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DePaul University
College of Education

**EDUCATORS' POSITIVE STRESS RESPONSES:
EUSTRESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL**

Dissertation in Education
with a Concentration in Educational Leadership

by

Karen Bradley

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

June 2014

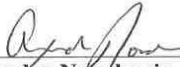
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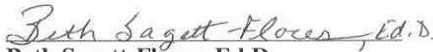
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Abstract

This study contributes qualitative support for the Positive Psychology concepts of Psychological Capital and eustress in the field of education. The research questions ask how stressors inherent in public education today may positively influence the meaning-making teachers engage in. The constructs of Psychological Capital (hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism) are explored viewing their relationship to positive meaning-making for these individuals.

The study is based on life history interviews with six teachers identified as being positively oriented in their outlook. The career trajectory of each was discussed, along with identification of successes and challenges in being a public school teacher at this time in history. The data was coded both deductively for the Psychological Capital constructs and inductively for other themes. The themes that arose inductively centered on relationship building and professional growth and change. These two areas serve as the central points of meaning-making for these teachers.

The resources of Psychological Capital seem to work to provide a buffer that allows for the positive meaning-making found in the relationships, professional growth and positive orientation towards even difficult change. Work engagement is the outcome evidencing the relationship between the PsyCap resources and the positively oriented meaning-making of the teachers in their work. Work engagement was found to arise from the urgency and savoring of the individuals, most notably from the areas of relationship building and professional growth and change.

The study also presents a contrasting example of a teacher who does not seem to engage the resources of Psychological Capital as effectively, has a more distressful orientation, and exhibits less work engagement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Education is a complicated profession, and the range and depth of the stressors encountered by not only the profession as a whole but also the individual teacher seem to be increasing exponentially. Children come to school immersed in a video game culture that is often unfamiliar to their teachers, need more social services than ever before, budgets are tighter, accountability ceilings get higher and higher, and the critique of public education is played out in the media nearly daily, rarely highlighting the positive impact most teachers have. This pressure victimizes many teachers, with burnout as the result. For many teachers, when one hears “I’m so stressed out”, it is an indication that they are suffering from victimization, walking under a heavier load each day and seemingly feeling the generalized pressures at a level at which it is difficult for them to cope.

On the other hand, however, are some teachers who seem to incorporate these stressors into the importance of their work, leading to higher levels of engagement with their work, and better outcomes for students. I have noticed in my work with teachers that there are some teachers who seem to think about their work in a way that causes them to internalize the stressors of being a teacher in a way that motivates them. These are the teachers for whom, when one asks how they are and they say (usually with an energetic smile) “I’m so stressed out”, you know it is because there are so many balls in the air that the teacher is working on and she knows her input on each one is critical to her students’

overall success. For these teachers, finding a way to provide breakfast for the children who come without it is a priority, not a hassle. Working on committees to improve the overall quality of schooling provided to children is an integral part of their contribution to the profession, not another burden or requirement to be met. Meeting children before school to pre-teach concepts or provide reinforcement is necessary for their students to succeed, not another responsibility they do not have time for. These teachers experience the same stressors but internalize them in a way that gives an additional layer of meaning to their work.

This research looks at theoretical frameworks that can help to explain how it is that, with the same pressures, some teachers have positive outcomes and seemingly incorporate stressors into their work engagement and the meaning-making that occurs and what, if anything, can be done organizationally to encourage that positive orientation. I begin with a brief look at the negative framing of stress in the research, and then move on to the concept of eustress, or positive stress. Eustress and its outcomes are considered under the theoretical framework of the Positive Psychology movement; at a more specific level, positive stress in the workplace is a component of the study of Positive Organizational Behavior. At the micro-level of the individual, I use the concept of Psychological Capital, also a Positive Psychology construct, to look at possible assets that some individuals may use to organize their thinking about stressors. I also discuss the concept and indicators of work engagement, an important outcome and indicator of eustressful responses to stressors.

Stress in the Workplace.

Stress is a concept that has been widely examined in both the scholarly literature and the popular press. Nearly everyone has some understanding of what stress is and most people likely can claim to have been affected by it at some point in their work lives. Today's workplace is competitive, changing, and comprised of many gray areas in terms of responsibilities and ethical decision-making (Crouter & Manke, 1994; Prochaska, Levesque, Prochaska, Dewart, & Wing, 2001). The range, intensity, and variety of challenges is changing and increasing. Personal threshold "pushing" with regards to those challenges often causes stress in the workplace. However, employers are looking for individuals who thrive on chaos or uncertainty, and who learn and grow through hardship (Hamel & Vlaikangas, 2003).

Work-related stress has a potentially debilitating impact on individual employee health and well-being, as well as financial and work production implications for organizations. Work-related stress is costly; absenteeism, employee turnover, diminished productivity, medical, legal and insurance expenses and Workers' Compensation payments add up to over three hundred billion dollars a year for US businesses (AIS, 2011). Developing strategies for coping with workplace stress is big business; organizations often try to identify sources of stress and seek ways to minimize its effects through a variety of employee programs or strategies (Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2011; Hahn, Binnewies, Sonnetag, & Mojza, 2011; Weiss, 2010).

Pressure to perform is inherent in any job. Many organizations have structures or programs to help employees reactively deal with the effects of stress arising from

workplace pressures. However most organizations do not realize the full potential of their human resources (Avolio, 2005) as a result of not proactively investing in employee well-being. Human resource management is most often focused on deficit reduction or on a reactive response to a problem, not on optimizing potential; as a result the human resources of many organizations are often not fully developed or managed to their full potential.

This study uses some concepts from the field of Occupational Health Psychology (OHP), which “applies psychology in organizational settings for the improvement of work life, the protection and safety of workers, and the promotion of healthy work. Healthy work exists where people feel good, achieve high performance, and have high levels of well-being” (Quick, 1999). The study of Occupational Health Psychology includes an overlap between behavioral science, medicine, and management. It is based in objective knowledge, self-assessment, and skills-based training to address well-being and mental health in the workplace. OHP seeks to design and maintain healthy work environments by addressing variables including concepts intrinsic to the job, related to the individual’s role in the organization, career trajectory, relationships, or organizational structures. Professionals in the field of Occupational Health Psychology often specialize in one or more of these areas, seeking to prevent or intervene where there are stressors in the work environment, for the individual, or in the interface between home and work, seeking to minimize stress and promote well-being. In Positive Psychology, OHP is viewed through the lens of Positive Organizational Behavior, which will be described later in this paper. This study attempts to fit in at the level of the individual’s management of some of the variables around stress.

Studying Stress.

A pioneer researcher in the area of defining and understanding stress was Dr. Hans Selye. In his early work, Selye (1974) defined stress as “the non-specific response of the body to the demands made upon it” (p. 14). Stress is a dynamic condition, involving interaction between an individual and the environment, “in which there is an opportunity, a constraint, urgency, pressure, mental or physical tension, or a demand as related to perceived outcomes, both certain and uncertain” (Sorenson, 2007, p. 10). Stress is also contextual and involves a process (Folkman, 2010). Although not originally conceptualized as an entirely or exclusively negative force, the understanding of stress has taken on a life of its own, in everyday life and in the research literature, being characterized as undesirable and inevitably having maladaptive consequences for individuals or organizations.

Stress, coping, and well-being are most typically viewed as a negative feedback loop: stress has a negative impact on well-being, causing the initiation of coping strategies, which in turn influence the nature of a stress response (Edwards & Cooper, 1988). The majority of the research to date has focused on identifying causes of distress, identifying coping mechanisms, and developing ways of dealing with the undesirable effects of distress. Distress is the physical and psychological reaction of the body and the mind that results in the need for coping. Distress is the negative side of responding to a stressor, resulting in negative outcomes often associated with ill health. The causes of workplace stress have been explored in some depth by researchers and human resource

departments; the negative effects of stress in the workplace are evident in employee absenteeism, morale, and longevity.

Teachers have been found to self-report higher levels of work-related stress than in other white collar professions (Cox & Brockley, 1984; Nerrell & Wahlund, 1981). In a study of the nature of work related stress in Great Britain, Cox and Brockley (1984) found that teachers reported more job-related stress than non-teachers. This study was based on a self-report measure in which teachers identified five areas of stressors: training, nature of the work (workload, classroom situation, resources, student behavior), the physical work environment, the school organization (size, management, role of the teacher), and the relationship between the school and the community. Sources of stress for teachers are inherent in the organization of schools. Teachers face pressure to complete tasks, to avoid errors, in work overloads, through high stakes testing, demanding administrators, disgruntled colleagues, and irate parents (Sorenson, 2007). Teachers are required to problem solve, manage conflict, set goals, manage time, make ethical decisions, and deal with organizational politics in addition to instructing in one or more content areas.

It is clear to me from my experiences in working with a wide range of teachers in both urban and suburban settings and both large and smaller schools that stress does not have to be synonymous with burnout. I have worked with teachers in situations in which resources are limited both inside and outside the school, class sizes are very large, and many students and families are ill equipped to deal with the demands of the education system. Yet some teachers thrive even under adverse conditions. How is it that the pressures inherent in today's education system lead to burnout for so many teachers, but

for some others seem to provide a meaningful base for the work they do? Beyond an inherent personality type, are some individuals better equipped to deal with stress? If so, is there a way to foster that capacity in others?

Viewing stressors in a positive way may lead to different outcomes than if stressors are viewed as entirely detrimental to individuals and organizations. If an individual perceives that he is able to meet the demands of the stressor, and meeting those demands is important to him, a eustressful response can result (Edwards & Cooper, 1988). How can the stressors that factor into work pressure be identified as contributing to productivity and work engagement? How are perceptions of the effects of stress and the ability to deal with them different if stressors are examined through the lens of positive psychology? How can a better understanding of how some individuals make sense of their world, with all of its pressures, and do not seem to be continually subjected to the negative effects of large and small stressors be described? Can that capability be developed?

The purpose of this dissertation research is to examine the ways in which individuals, in this case teachers, describe drawing on their assets, identified in this paper as psychological capital, in dealing with stressors in their occupation in a way that gives meaning to their daily work.

Stress research is rooted in the psychology literature and is largely quantitative in nature. The very nature of quantitative research does not allow for a deep examination of the process people engage in or the nuanced tools individuals access and utilize when making sense of and describing their experiences. The way in which one reacts to

stressors or incorporates them into a life approach may be impacted by past experiences, values, goals, affect, and a myriad of other influences. There is a need for qualitative research in this area to hear specific voices describing the ways in which people think about and make sense of work stress and the personal assets they utilize in dealing with stress. The vast majority of studies in the area of stress research rely on questionnaires or rating scales, which are generally developed to be used across a wide range of settings and lack descriptive power for specific people in specific contexts. This study contributes teachers' detailed description of stressors and their positive response to them, gathering narrative data about the quantitative descriptors of both psychological capital and eustress that have come from other studies such as the work of Fred Luthans (2002a, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008) and Debra Nelson and Brett Simmons (2003, 2004, 2011). This research provides qualitative descriptions of the experiences of teachers with the variety of stressors inherent in the work. Qualitative data gathering provides contextualization of teachers' experiences beyond what has been gleaned from the quantitative data collected by previous researchers. It is relevant to the field of education that the instances described come from the teaching field as we continue to develop an understanding of the pressures teachers face and how the reaction of teachers impacts their own well-being and their impact on students.

Teaching is well known to be a highly demanding and stressful occupation, cognitively and emotionally, even physically. There is a significant volume of research dedicated to role ambiguity faced by teachers (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Mitchell, 1990; Conley & Woosley, 2000a) to the pressures of accountability (Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick, 2009; Cruz & Brown, 2010), and the ways in which student-teacher

interactions can be stressful (Borg, Riding, & Falzon, 1991; Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, 1995; Byrne, 1994; Coldicott, 1985; Kyriacou, 1987). Additionally authors mention workload (Boyle, et al., 1995) and work conditions (Boyle, et al., 1995) as significantly contributing to burnout. Most of the literature with regards to teachers, both quantitative and qualitative, describes burnout, or the ways in which the stress of the job becomes too much to handle. Much of the research focuses on the ways in which teachers feel victimized by the profession, whether by the actions of students, unsupportive administration, or accountability paradigms. There are parallels within the research on the stresses of nursing (Gelsema, van der Doef, Maes, Akerboom, & Verhoeven, 2005; Gray-Toft & Anderson, 1981; Revicki & May, 1989). The connection to nursing is important because the study of eustress in nurses and nursing students is also in its infancy but developing with some parallels.

Nurses and teachers face many similar stresses, likely largely due to the complex human services, caring nature of both professions in interacting with human beings and the high levels of burnout in each of these professions. There is a small but growing body of research in the nursing field about the presence of eustress and the ways in which nurses are able to identify and use eustress to find and describe meaning in their work (Thorpe & Barsky, 2001; Verhaeghe, Vlerick, Gemmel, Van Maele, & De Backer, 2006). It is time for this type of research in the field of education. This study attempts to begin that dialogue through the identification of some teachers' experiences of using their assets, or psychological capital, to positively view stressors impacting their work and giving meaning to the experiences they have in the classroom. The assets of psychological capital are available to the individual to invest in managing stressful

situations. Outcomes from this research may include some management strategies to help advance the positive perspective on stressors through the development of psychological capital, as well as assist in identifying and hiring individuals who are most likely to view the stressors of the job in a positive light, using them in meaning-making in their work.

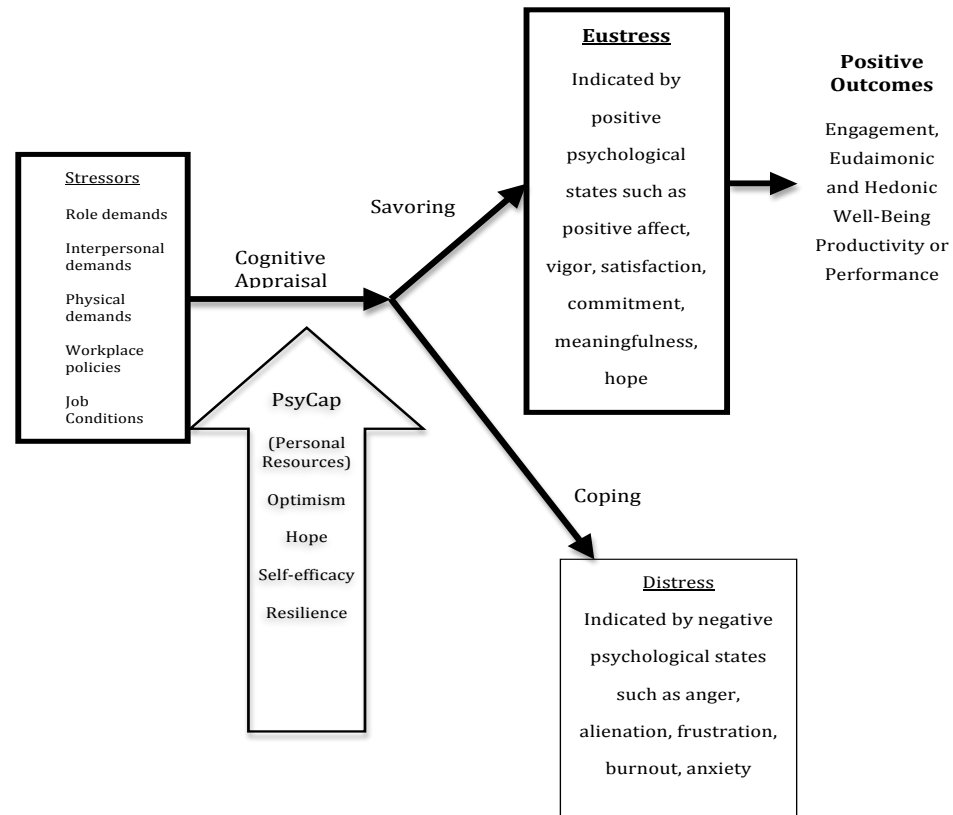
The generation of eustress differs from the management of distress; it has its own benefits. Experiencing positive reactions and outcomes, even if not perfect, can lead to pursuit of additional challenges and the generation of increased self-efficacy, hope, and resilience. In order to retain effective teachers in the profession, we need to minimize the victimization but equally as importantly increase the urgency felt by teachers in serving students, helping teachers to identify and manage positive responses and resources.

I have observed, however, that some teachers seem to understand these stressors inherent in the profession today to be a part of the urgent nature of the work done in schools, part of the reason the work of teachers is so important to the lives of students. This study is a qualitative look at the ways in which some teachers respond to, understand, and incorporate the stressors inherent in public school teaching today into their work in positive ways, leading to meaning making and away from burnout. Teachers who experience their roles as challenging but are able to identify how their experiences provide meaning in their lives and the lives of others will likely be more engaged and experience more hedonic and eudaimonic well being. Positive well-being of teachers directly impacts classroom outcomes and school communities (Beaudoin, 2011; Reese, 2004; Simbula, 2010).

Exploring stressors as a challenge that allows the individual to make sense of the world adds a qualitative, story-telling, meaning-making realm, bringing the work on stress out of strictly quantitative territory. Description of positive psychological states and assets can be expressed through the story-telling of individuals engaged in meaningful work. One of the intents of examining this subject in a qualitative way is to look at detailed descriptions of work engagement that give an “over time” perspective as opposed to the point in time perspective that questionnaires or surveys may represent. This study contributes the contextualized perspective of a group of teachers for whom workplace stress provides motivation and urgency to their work (engagement) as well as insight into the ways in which they utilize assets, rather than deficits, in approaching the pressures of the workplace.

Figure 1 presents an overview of the concepts and the relationships explored through this interpretive study. This study builds on the understandings being developed in the field of Positive Psychology (macro lens), Positive Organizational Behavior (a subfield of OHP) and stress management. Through the stories of teachers, I hope to add strength and voice to the existing empirical data that suggests that psychological capital is a resource that is utilized in the mediation of the workplace, specifically in the employee’s relationship with the many stressors encountered in daily work. The intent of this qualitative study is to develop understandings of the ways in which educators utilize the stressors inherent in their jobs and organizations as a positive means of achieving desirable work outcomes.

Figure 1: Integrating the role of Psychological Capital with a holistic model of stress



Adapted from *Health psychology and work stress: A more positive approach* (p.102), by D. Nelson and B.L. Simmons, 2003, in *Handbook of occupational health psychology*, J.C. Quick and L.E. Tetrick (Eds.). Washington, D.C., American Psychological Association

Problem and Purpose

This study arises from both a desire for a practical exploration of the concept of positive stress in order to better support practitioners and a lack of existing data to guide understanding in this area.

In the nearly twenty-five years I have worked as an educator, I have had the opportunity to work alongside all kinds of teachers in all kinds of situations. I have worked overseas in the bush of Africa, in a dense city in Asia, and in the US in neighborhoods of urban blight, in an affluent urban neighborhood, and in the suburbs of a major city. I have worked with veteran and novice teachers, single teachers and teachers with families, teachers with eighteen students in their class and teachers with nearly forty in their class. Across situations, I have observed that some teachers literally thrive no matter what is placed in their path while others retire to the teachers' lounge to complain about the burdens placed on teachers once again. There has been a great deal of study in the field about those teachers who burn out as a result of the stressors of teaching (e.g. Conley & Woosley, 2000b; Haberman, 2005); I am curious about those who thrive. As a current school administrator, I am interested in how some teachers utilize or interpret the stressors faced by all teachers in a way that gives urgency and meaning to their work. I believe that one of my most important roles in my job as a school administrator, in addition to hiring the right people, is to support teachers and their development. It is my hope that this study may provide some insight into how to identify and support teachers who already approach their work from a meaning-making perspective and how to foster that facility in others. Therefore, the practical purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which teachers describe incorporating the stressors inherent in the profession of

teaching into the meaning of their work, particularly in the areas of understanding eustress and psychological capital in order to recognize eustress and incorporate it into the leadership of schools.

Of particular interest to me are the ways in which some teachers talk about stressors such as accountability, the impact of poverty on students, and increased responsibilities placed on schools, as activating something of a moral imperative to do outstanding work rather than as forces that victimize teachers and prevent them from doing outstanding work. The concepts of eustress and psychological capital are emerging in the literature as useful constructs to inform and organize an exploration of positive stress in the field of education.

To date there has not been research done with these concepts in the field of education. Seemingly all of the research into stressors in education centers on the ways in which they lead to burnout. The purpose of this research is to begin to establish a research base in the field of education as relates to positive stress and the ways in which teachers may incorporate stressors into the meaning of their work.

Research Questions

The specific research questions to be answered by this doctoral research arise from the purpose and conceptual argument developed in this paper:

- How do teachers' life experiences and values contribute to their understanding of the stressors inherent in public school teaching today?

- How do those elements of modern day public school teaching typically thought to be stressful on teachers influence the way in which some teachers define their role as teachers? How do these stressors contribute to the meaning these teachers ascribe to their work?
- Does a positive orientation towards stressors contribute to a teacher's sense of urgency or meaning construction in their work?
- What personal resources do teachers identify as significant to their orientation towards the stressors inherent in the profession of teaching? In what ways do they draw upon those resources to utilize them as assets?
- How do the personal resources some teachers use in their experiences of stressors in the workplace lead to work engagement?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Distress and Coping

The description of the qualities of stress, its naming and definition, began with Hans Selye (1964) who described stress as a dynamic interaction between individuals and their environment. One immediately notices that Selye does not give a negative connotation to stress; rather stress, or more specifically a stressor, is framed as something in the environment that has an effect on an individual. In fact Selye, who was interested in the physiological response of the body to a demand, posited that stress could be associated with both pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Over time, however, stress has consistently been depicted negatively, as inevitably having detrimental effects on health and well-being. Although it was not Selye's intention or perspective, stress has become a concept that is mired in the negative, consistently understood as distress.

Distress “occurs when the demands placed on the body exceed its capacity to expend energy in maintaining homeostasis” (Le Fevre, Matheny, & Kolt, 2003, p. 729).

Distress is the physical and psychological reaction of the body and the mind that results in the need for coping. Coping refers to the “thoughts and behaviors people use to manage the internal and external demands of stress” (Folkman, 2010, p. 902). The vast majority of the literature about stress in the workplace, both scholarly and popular literature, focuses on how job stress negatively affects individuals, leading to negative consequences for mental and physical health, job burnout and tension within the family

outside of work. In our society, in this day and age, workplace stress is typically described as distress. The next section will give a brief overview of the progression and evolution in the understanding of stress.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory.

There is an immense body of literature on coping with stressors; this literature base covers coping with the small stresses of daily living to large stressful situations such as war, death of a loved one, or dealing with a terminal illness. The most significant and comprehensive work on coping has been done by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Their work emphasizes that coping is a process and is contextually based, not rooted in personality traits.

Coping is defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 141). Through their work they conceptualized the cognitive appraisal theory. According to this theory, the coping process is an evaluative process in which the individual determines if the stressor is a threat or a challenge in relation to his well-being and formulates a response in light of that analysis. A stressor perceived as a threat has the potential for harm or loss; a challenge stressor includes the possibility of mastery or benefit from the situation (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986).

The appraisal, or evaluative, function is influenced by personal and situational factors and is based in cognition, not conditioned response. Coping is not an automatic, adaptive response, but rather takes effort. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) recognize that

individuals do not respond to a stressor with an either/or approach, classifying stressors as all threat or all challenge but more often as a combination of the two. Therefore, a stressor can simultaneously elicit both a challenge and a threat response.

With this model, an individual draws on general or specific beliefs about values and goals, and evaluates coping resources, including physical, social, and material resources. The individual attempts to manage the relationship between themselves and the environment. The cognitive appraisal theory, in their work, applies to the range of stressors in life from small daily hassles, to events that are catastrophic to an individual, to large-scale catastrophic societal events.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe coping as problem focused and/or emotion focused. Both problem focused and emotion focused coping involve cognitive and behavioral components in which analysis and action work together or against each other. In problem focused coping, the individual seeks to alter the person-environment relationship that is causing distress by defining the problem, generating alternative solutions, weighing them and choosing. With emotion focused coping, the individual seeks to alleviate stressful emotions through behaviors such as avoidance, minimization, distancing, selective attention, and wresting positive value from negative events. However, no matter the coping mechanism, the individual's interaction with the stressor is generally described as being centered in a negative framework. The individual copes, or manages, the experience and emotions, and may change perspectives or utilize different strategies throughout the process.

Meaning Focused Coping and Positive Emotion Coping.

Folkman's more recent work further explores the role of positive emotions and meaning-making in the coping process. She expands on the cognitive appraisal theory to explore the role of positive emotions alongside negative ones, meaning focused coping, positive emotion coping, and the development of meaning from stressful situations. These approaches incorporate positive reappraisal in which an individual seeks to align stressful events with their belief system to avoid chronic distress. Her most significant contribution to these findings was a longitudinal study of over 250 people caring for their partners with AIDS. Caring for a loved one who is dying is a very stressful situation; her findings, however, indicated that throughout the caring time and even after the death of the loved one, caregivers routinely drew on positive emotions, demonstrated positive affect, and ascribed meaning to the difficulties faced, aiding in their coping processes (Folkman, et al., 2007).

The meaning focused coping framework acknowledges that life is full of meaning, or significance, in even the smallest of interactions with the environment. Meaning making with regards to coping with stressors can be associated with an orientation towards an individual's goals and the degree to which the individual can control the outcome of a situation, orienting it towards goal acquisition. With meaning focused coping, individuals use cognitive strategies to manage the meaning of the stressful situation, orienting it with their general life orientation, infusing personal significance, identifying causality or finding meaning as a result of the outcome of the stressful situation.

Through meaning based coping, individuals may find benefit from the situation, reorder priorities or goals, or infuse personal meaning into ordinary events beyond their intrinsic situational meaning. The individual uses reappraisal of the situation to draw on their beliefs and values (global meaning) more than on the specifics of the situation, integrating the stressor with their belief about the world (Park & Folkman, 1997). Failure to find some connection between the outcome of the stressful situation and one's more global beliefs can lead to chronic distress and lack of resolution.

Park and Folkman (1997) propose that distress is alleviated to the extent which an individual can integrate the appraised meaning of the events with his global beliefs and continue working towards his desired goals. Events that make one's goals unattainable challenge the global belief systems. Although not the focus of this dissertation work, in looking at teachers' reactions to stress, it seems that this might be a basis for some distress, the political and social reality of teaching being incongruent with teachers' values and goals.

Folkman and Moscovitz (2004) have also developed theories involving positive coping emotions, reframing the emotional response of their earlier work as a balance of positive and negative emotions that help individuals find benefit in stressful situations. The benefit found in these situations leads to growth or change, leading to more positive well-being. The result is a response to a stressor that is not entirely negatively oriented. The process of positive reappraisal helps the individual to reconcile stressful situational events with their larger beliefs about the world. In this framework, meaning is operationalized as an understanding of the significance, or perception of significance, that an event has for an individual, incorporating the event into global beliefs or changing

global beliefs as a result of the situation. The meaning of the stressful situation is re-oriented so positive emotions and psychological well-being are experienced (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000b). Positive and negative emotions occur concurrently in a stressful situation; meaning focused coping utilizes the positive emotions to restore the resources needed for coping (Folkman, 2010).

However, even with this focus on positive emotions as mediators of the stressful situation, there is still an undercurrent that positions all stressors as negative, something to be mastered, tolerated or reduced. The meaning focused coping (Park & Folkman, 1997) and positive emotion coping theories (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004) begin to approach the concept of eustress but with some significant differences. Each of those theories still position stressors as something to be coped with, a negative frame of reference. The concepts of goals as a basis for meaning-making is echoed in some of the Positive Psychology concepts introduced later. The focus of this study will likely use some of these constructs but move them closer to the conceptual view of eustress, positive stress; instead of viewing meaning-making as a coping response or a means of managing stressors, it will be seen as an outcome to be desired and striven for in and of itself.

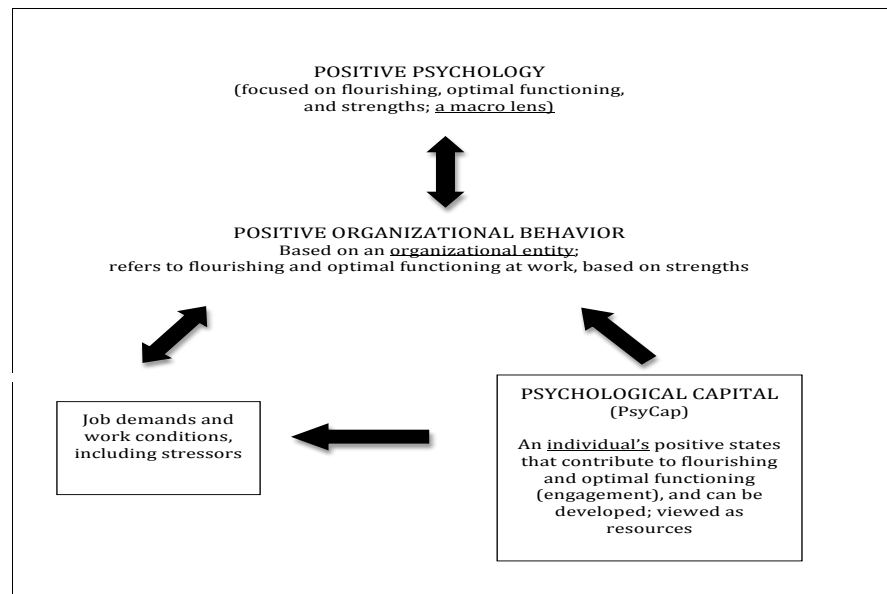
Theoretically, eustress orients stressors as something to be desired, as something positive which results in positive outcomes, giving meaning to the situation (Nelson, Simmons, Antoniou, & Cooper, 2005). This shifts away from examining the response (negative) and towards understanding the actual stressor in a positive light, resulting in positive outcomes and positive psychological states. Both require a starting point in cognitive appraisal but coping examines the effects of the negative response to the

stressor and eustress examines the individual's positive interpretation of the stressor. The positive outcome in the case of workplace eustress is work engagement, the opposite of burnout.

Positive Psychology: A Macro Lens

This next section will explore the contextual framework for looking at stress in the workplace through a positive lens. The field of Positive Psychology will serve as a macro lens to describe the positive orientation within psychology. Then workplace stress will be oriented within the study of Positive Organizational Behavior, a subfield of Positive Psychology. Finally, an understanding of the individual in the organization will be looked at through description of a Positive Organizational Behavior construct, the concept of psychological capital (PsyCap). Several organizational theories, such as the Conservation of Resources and the Job Demands-Resources model contribute to the ideas to be discussed here. Figure 2 depicts the relationship between Positive Psychology, Positive Organizational Behavior and psychological capital.

Figure 2: The relationship between Positive Psychology, Positive Organizational Behavior and PsyCap



As noted above, the study of stress is undertaken primarily in the field of psychology. Psychology as a discipline has been defined by three over-arching areas of concern: (1) healing mental illness or pathology, (2) making the lives of all people more fruitful, and (3) the actualization of human potential (F. Luthans, 2002a; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). To date, most work in the field of psychology has centered on the first focus, employing a disease orientation to identify what is wrong with people, focusing on risk, problems, pathology and treatment (Masten, 2001). In recent years,

through the Positive Psychology movement, there has been increased attention on the latter two missions of the field of psychology.

The field of Positive Psychology came about as a reaction to the focus on the negative elements of human functioning by the psychology field (F. Luthans, 2002a; Masten, 2001). Through the Positive Psychology movement there is a renewed interest in looking through a positive lens when studying psychological states in an individual and in organizational behavior. This positive orientation recognizes the need to build on strengths for the promotion of both individual and organizational flourishing and wellness instead of focusing solely on the remediation of weaknesses.

The field of Positive Psychology focuses on what is right with people, looking at strengths instead of weaknesses, resilience instead of vulnerability, the enhancement and development of wellness instead of remediation of pathology, with an emphasis on theory and research before application to practice (F. Luthans, 2002b). Theoretical understandings of the promotion of the flourishing of individuals and organizations based on sound research practices and focusing on psychological states that can be developed through intervention are being developed. The base in research distinguishes Positive Psychology from many of the popular self-help books and motivational speakers available today. Major researchers in the field of positive psychology have included Martin Seligman and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), Ed Deiner (2000), Christopher Peterson (2000) and C. Rick Snyder (2000).

Positive Psychology is “a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5)

which places value on the individual's subjective experience of the past, present, and future through examination of well-being, contentment, hope, optimism, flow, and happiness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive Psychology, as an over-arching lens, is oriented in identifying conditions, traits and strengths that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people and institutions, promoting health and well-being (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive Psychology is "concerned with people's strengths (rather than weaknesses and dysfunction) and how they can grow and thrive (rather than be fixed and maintained)" (F. Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008, p. 220).

In this view, health is recognized as the promotion of well-being and the realization of an individual's potential (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), not simply the absence of disease. The idea of health and well-being is expanding to include not only physical health and hedonic health (happiness) but also eudaimonic health, which includes motivation and behaviors that lead to self-realization and the fulfilling of one's potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001). In short, instead of concentrating on what is wrong with people, Positive Psychology examines ways of optimizing functioning, flourishing and self-realization (F. Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007).

Stress is already known to have an impact on physical health and general happiness levels; researchers are beginning to look at the impacts of stressors on self-realization using a positive lens to examine the ways in which stressors add to the quality of our lives instead of only detracting from it. The theoretical basis for understanding positive stress, eustress, is solidly rooted in the Positive Psychology movement (Seligman

& Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and concepts of Positive Organizational Behavior (F. Luthans, 2002a).

Positive Organizational Behavior

Organizational Behavior is a scholarly field that overlaps psychology, sociology, and business in looking at the components of organizational work including: management of people, organizational culture, leadership, team dynamics, job satisfaction, training and the interface of job and family. Theory and research distinguish the study of Organizational Behavior from the writings of self-help authors and titles such as Steven Covey's *Seven Habits*, Spencer Johnson's *Who Moved My Cheese*, Ken Blanchard's *One Minute Manager*, and Norman Peale's *Power of Positive Thinking*.

The sub-field of Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) adds a positive orientation that is proactive and emphasizes strengths. Positive Organizational Behavior is defined by Luthans as “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace” (F. Luthans, 2002a, p. 59). Positive Organizational Behavior is the application of positive psychology to the workplace.

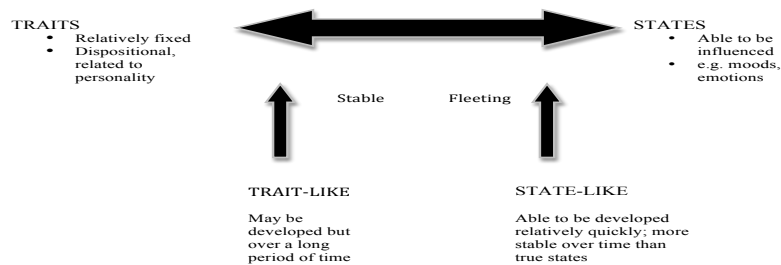
POB recognizes that there are positive elements that have long been components of the understandings of organizational behavior (e.g. positive reinforcement, job satisfaction and commitment, pro-social citizenship behaviors) but additionally seeks to

more broadly apply the views of Positive Psychology, emphasizing the positive (Youssef & Luthans, 2007) but also focusing on the growth of the individual employee as an important goal in itself. The fostering of contentment, optimism, and the actualization of human potential is as important as the organizational goals (Avey, Luthans, Smith, & Palmer, 2010). POB is the application of the theories and research of Positive Psychology, including looking at positive psychological capacities such as confidence, hope, resiliency, optimism, and happiness in organizational behaviors (F. Luthans, 2002b). Work engagement is another construct that is included under the umbrella of POB (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Understanding psychological capacities as human resource strengths is one area studied by researchers in POB. To be included as a human resource strength, a psychological capacity must meet several criteria including being positive, theory and research based, measurable, state-like, and having a demonstrated work performance impact (F. Luthans, 2002a, 2002b; F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007). Positive Psychology includes many psychological capacities; however, those that are included in POB are capacities that are state-like, and thus open to development in the workplace.

Dispositional traits and states are recognized as a continuum of characteristics with traits being more fixed and states being developable, open to change and management in the workplace. POB capacities fall on the state-like end of the continuum. Figure 3 shows the continuum from traits to states. The use of the term state-like implies malleability and then stability with change over time, as opposed to fleeting states such as moods or positive emotions (F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007).

Figure 3: The continuum between states and traits



Development of state-like capacities can happen through short, highly focused targeted training programs, and professional development as demonstrated by Luthans, Avolio, Norman, & Combs (2006). In this early study, the researchers developed a “micro-intervention” in the format of a one to three hour training that was used with management students and then subsequently with people already in management positions. In each case, the PsyCap (see next section) of the individuals was measured, using the PsyCap questionnaire, before the training and then again afterwards. During the training, the facilitator took the group through exercises in which they utilized strategies for:

- goal development and identification of obstacles,

- the elimination of negative self-talk,
- identification of means to enhance assets and proactively avoid adverse events, and
- task mastery through vicarious learning, social persuasion and positive feedback.

Strategies for the development of hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience were used. As there is considerable overlap in the constructs, there is also overlap in the strategies used, but all are rooted in goal identification and attainment.

In both the students and the managers, the PsyCap was found to increase by 3%, as opposed to no increase in a group that received a non-applicable training session. The use of training to change the ability to utilize these capacities indicates that they are malleable and able to be developed.

Individuals make up organizations. As discussed above, one area of POB is concerned with positive psychological capacities that reside in individuals. These capacities are of interest to POB when they can be developed to not only further the organizational goals but also to promote the eudaimonic health of the individual. Eudaimonic health includes the aspects of mental health beyond just happiness and pleasure seeking into the realm of the fulfillment of personal potential.

Psychological Capital

Beyond the organizational level, at the level of analysis of the individual person, the concept of psychological capital (PsyCap) has emerged from the Positive Psychology movement via Hobfoll's Theory of Conservation of Resources (COR). As mentioned in the previous section, PsyCap is concerned with psychological capacities or assets. These assets can be thought of as resources that can be invested. Capital can be accumulated for investment and can be utilized to enable benefits for the individual.

The Theory of Conservation of Resources is based upon a model of individuals seeking to build, retain and protect resources in biological, cognitive and social domains (Hobfoll, 1989). Resources are broadly defined but Hobfoll recognizes four types of resources: objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies. According to the Conservation of Resources theory, stress happens when resources in one or more of these are threatened with depletion or when resources are invested without a corresponding return on the investment (Hobfoll, 2002). The gathering of resources is a proactive preparation for inevitable stress. Additionally, according to the COR theory, resources tend to generate other resources in an effect known as "caravanning". A resource caravan is thought of as a bundle of resources.

Hobfoll's work discusses the potential for diminishing or depleting of resources resulting from a stressful encounter. His work also, however, suggests that if successful coping occurs resources can be conserved or even expanded as a result of a stressful encounter. Further, he puts forth that those who have ample resources are less likely to encounter situations as stressful and be more capable of finding solutions when they do.

The impact of resources working in caravans is greater over time and varying circumstances, longer lasting, and less likely to be impacted by stressors (Hobfoll, 2002).

Positive psychological capacities can be conceptualized as resources. Consistent with the criterion of capacities in POB, the resources to be considered must be measurable, developable and manageable. Psychological capital encompasses an individual's psychological capacities and resources that inform how they make meaning from life experiences (Culbertson, Fullagar, & Mills, 2010). The development of these capacities may help in the proactive preparation for stress and the generation of other resources.

The use of the term “capital” in PsyCap is derived from the concept of economic capital, or resources, which are invested and leveraged for future return. This differs from sociological uses of the term capital in which there are socially constructed dynamics in which one person or group has an inherent advantage or power to be leveraged for gain over another, in which there is someone on the other end of the transaction negotiating the value of another. With Psychological Capital, the individual invests resources that enable personal benefits; potential is invested for benefit. This use of “capital” refers to an individual's personal and inherent potential with regards to these resources, which can be intentionally developed independently of any particular social structures. This study will focus primarily on personal resources that influence an individual's sense of their ability to control and impact their environment in a manner that contributes to their own goal achievement.

Psychological Capital is a higher order construct that is understood at this time to be composed of four capacities or “resources”: self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resiliency (Culbertson, et al., 2010; F. Luthans, 2002b; F. Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004; F. Luthans & Youssef, 2004; F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007). Future work in the study of PsyCap may include examining other cognitive and affective constructs, social capacities or higher order strengths for inclusion; creativity, wisdom, well-being, flow, humor, gratitude, forgiveness, emotional intelligence, spirituality, authenticity, and courage are possibilities (F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007).

The four capacities of PsyCap work together for an impact that is greater than any one of them has individually. PsyCap is “an individual’s positive state of development and is characterized by (a) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (b) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (c) persevering towards goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths towards goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (d) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success” (F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007, p. 3). Self-efficacy is often used interchangeably with confidence in Positive Psychology although many researchers, perhaps most notably Bandura, develop the idea of self-efficacy beyond simple confidence. Self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience are all state-like capacities on the continuum from pure positive traits to pure positive states. PsyCap’s capacities are conceptualized as inputs rather than as desirable outcomes; use of one’s PsyCap resources (inputs) leads to performance outcomes. These state-like capacities are developable and vary situationally. Each of the four contributes to the core construct of

PsyCap, interacting not only additively but also synergistically (F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007), with the whole and its interaction being greater than the sum of the parts. Although there are conceptual similarities and overlap between optimism, hope, self-efficacy, and resiliency, each has been conceptually and empirically demonstrated to have construct validity (Avey, Luthans, & Youssef, 2010; F. Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007; F. Luthans, et al., 2004; F. Luthans & Youssef, 2004).

Each of these capacities is cognitive in nature with an orientation towards goal setting and success. Each has components of internalized agency, motivation, perseverance, and success expectancy (Avey, Luthans, & Youssef, 2010). The criterion for inclusion of a construct in PsyCap is greater than simply an indication of positive emotion. The capacity must include a cognitive agentic component that strives for measureable success and goal achievement (Avey, Luthans, & Youssef, 2010). The common link that ties the four capacities together is goal setting and task accomplishment (F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007), which may be evidenced through elements of perceptions, attributions, interpretations, appraisal of one's own experiences and the perceived probability of success (F. Luthans, Avolio, et al., 2007).

In summary, the higher order construct of PsyCap can be summarized as “one's positive appraisal of circumstances and probability of success based on motivated effort and perseverance” (Avey, Luthans, Smith, et al., 2010; F. Luthans, Avolio, et al., 2007, p. 550). Luthans, Avolio et al. (2005) showed through their study of Chinese factory workers that, although each construct has been shown to have conceptual independence, the sum of the components working together is greater than their individual impact. In this study, productivity and job satisfaction were greater when considering the higher

order construct of PsyCap than when evaluating the contribution of each of the sub-constructs individually.

Psychological capital does not function in isolation but is integrated with other human and social capitals such as knowledge, skills, experiences, relationships, social networks, effective role models, and positive feedback in order to maximize human potential. “PsyCap recognizes moving (developing) from the actual self (human, social and psychological capital) to the possible self” (F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007, p. 21). While not directly looking at the relationship between psychological capital and workplace stress, Culbertson, Fullagar et al. (2010) found direct relationships between the components of psychological capital and both hedonic (referring to general happiness) and eudaimonic (referring to the fulfillment of potential) well-being over the course of a two week study. The participants in their study, county extension agents, completed surveys with regards to the components of PsyCap at the end of their workday and then again before going to bed over the course of a two-week period. The results showed that the influence of PsyCap extended beyond the workplace and into a broader definition of well-being including hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. The work of Avey, Luthans et al. (2010) did not indicate a causal relationship between psychological capital and positive well-being at work but there was meaningful relationship indicated between the two over time. In their study with workers at a university, they utilized several surveys including the PsyCap questionnaire and the GHQ-12 (General Health Questionnaire) to look at the relationship of PsyCap and overall well-being at work using surveys taken at two week intervals. There was correlation but the researchers were not able to conclusively determine causality between the two constructs.

Given that some level of stress is inherent in most work, it is a natural fit to look at the stress response and its relationships with psychological capital as an intermediate step in drawing relationships between work stress and work engagement.

Luthans, Youssef et al. (2007) have developed a questionnaire to measure PsyCap, drawing from established measures of efficacy (Parker, 1998), hope (Snyder, et al., 1996), optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), and resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1993). Six items from each of those questionnaires were adapted for orientation towards the workplace. To date this measure has been used with engineers and technicians in the aerospace industry, executives in a logistics firm, nurses in hospitals, insurance-service employees, manufacturing workers, fast-food franchise managers, small business owners, IT engineers, and government employees (F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007). This questionnaire gathers quantitative data about these sub-constructs, through reliable and validated survey questions. This doctoral research, however, attempts to add a contextualized, richer description to these concepts through the narratives of the experiences of teachers.

PsyCap Capacities

The four capacities of Psychological Capital are hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy. Each of these capacities has defining characteristics.

Hope.

C. Rick Snyder is recognized as the pre-eminent researcher in the area of hope theory. Snyder defines hope as “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (1) agency (goal directed energy) and (2) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991, p. 287). Humans are intrinsically goal oriented. Hope is recognized as a cognitive state characterized by a proactive determination of the way to meet one’s goals, using strengths to manage around areas of weakness. Hope has both cognitive and agentic components.

The generation of hope involves a reiterative pathway between the will (agency) and the way (planning); the individual’s determination seeks pathways toward goal attainment. The creativity inherent in finding those pathways reinforces agency (Snyder, Rand, & Sigmon, 2005). Higher hope individuals understand that there may be more than one way for goals to be achieved and are prepared with a back-up route in case it should be needed. The components of agency and pathway have an additive effect, with both being necessary for hopeful thought. The two components are reciprocal processes but distinct from each other. The nursing literature also discusses a “being” dimension (will), a “doing” dimension (way) and a “becoming” dimension that anticipates future possibilities (Hammer, Morgenson, & Hall, 2009).

Hopeful goals are realistic but challenging; goal setting is characterized by self-determination, energy, and the perception of internalized control. With hope, individuals positively link themselves to a desirable outcome. A hopeful person is adept at thinking around obstacles and is therefore better equipped to deal with stress. Hopeful people are

able to clearly and vividly visualize and describe goals, and talk about solutions, not problems (Snyder, 1995; Snyder, 2000).

Hopeful employees are independent thinkers with an internal locus of control (the will component of hope), creative, and resourceful (the way component of hope). A positive relationship between hope and workplace performance has been established through a number of studies including the work of Adams, et al. (2003), Luthans and Jensen (2002), K. W. Luthans and Jensen (2005), Peterson and Luthans (2006), Snyder (1995) and Youssef and Luthans (2006). Hopeful employees perform better in stressful jobs, with a higher level of satisfaction, are less emotionally exhausted and have a higher likelihood of staying in the job (Adams, et al., 2003; Kirk & Koesk, 1995; Simmons & Nelson, 2001; Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Taylor & Brown, 1988). A positive relationship has been shown between hope and work-related goal expectancies, perceived control, positive emotions, coping, and achievement (Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997).

Hope has been shown to be developable in the workplace through specific goal setting, identification of stretch goals, stepping (breaking down goals into manageable steps), agency development, solution focused trainings, and strategic goal alignment training (Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Li, 2005; Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007; Snyder, 1995; Snyder, 2000). These components were integrated in the PsyCap intervention study (F. Luthans, et al., 2006) discussed earlier.

Optimism.

Hope and optimism are similar in that both are cognitive processes, are utilized by individuals cross-situationally and have valid measurement instruments. Optimism, however, is less action oriented than hope, serving more as a cognitive frame of reference for approaching situations. Hope is embedded in agency and pathway development.

Martin Seligman is recognized as the preeminent researcher in the field of optimism; however, the understanding of optimism, outside of its relationship with pessimism, is not as well developed as the other constructs at this time. Optimism has, however, been correlated with workplace performance (F. Luthans, Avolio, et al., 2007; F. Luthans, et al., 2005; Seligman, 1998).

Seligman defines optimism as “an explanatory style that attributes positive events to personal, permanent, and pervasive causes and interprets negative events in terms of external, temporary and situation-specific” (F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007, p. 90). Optimism is based on an expectation for the future (Carver & Scheier, 2005). Optimists take credit for positive events that happen, believing that they have in some way controlled the causes of the positive event, expecting the causes to continue and to be applicable to future events. Optimists embrace change and see the potential for the future; they are calculated risk-takers. Optimists assume that difficulties or adversity can be handled successfully. Optimism has been associated with perseverance, achievement, and motivation (Seligman, 1998). Peterson (2000) characterizes optimism as both motivated and motivating with cognitive and emotional components. Optimists are easily motivated

to work hard, exhibit high levels of aspiration, persevere, see failures as temporary setbacks, and generally feel upbeat both physically and mentally (F. Luthans, 2002b).

In its role as a component of psychological capital, it is important to recognize that optimism needs to be both realistic and flexible, with a recognition that some situations are beyond an individual's control. It is important to not overdo optimism, to not internalize every success too much or to shirk responsibility for failures. Schneider (2001) describes realistic optimism as having a leniency for the past, acknowledging positive as well as negative feedback, having an appreciation for the present, and seeking opportunities for the future; optimists see endeavors as a work in progress. Those with healthy optimism as a part of their PsyCap recognize the contributions of others, capitalize on situations to improve skills, learn from mistakes, and accept what cannot be changed (F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007; Schneider, 2001).

Interventions for the development of optimism in the workplace would include components of identification of self-defeating beliefs, evaluation of the accuracy of those beliefs, and replacement with more constructive beliefs (F. Luthans, et al., 2004) and were included in the intervention discussed earlier (F. Luthans, et al., 2006).

Resiliency.

In the Positive Psychology movement, the work of Ann Masten is recognized in the area of resiliency. Masten's work differs from some approaches to looking at resiliency and fits into Positive Psychology in that it gets away from the deficit model

of psychopathology. Much of the resiliency research presumes that resiliency traits are something extraordinary, which may, or may not, develop in the face of extreme adversity. Masten puts forth that, unless there has been an interruption of the developmental process, the characteristics of resiliency are present and available for development. “In other words, expecting extraordinary qualities in resilient individuals implied that development of resiliency with ordinary adaptive resources and systems were not enough” (Masten, 2001, p. 234).

Masten and Reed (2002) define resiliency as “a class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk” (p. 75). Resiliency involves assessing the level of threat in a situation and assessing if one has the resources to elicit an acceptable response. Masten’s (2001) work looks at resilience in light of everyday skills and psychological strengths, concluding that resilience does not come from “rare and special qualities” but rather is comprised of “ordinary, normative human resources” with “profound implications for promoting competence and human capital in individuals” (p. 235). Through her work, she describes the development of resiliency traits as being part of an ordinary normative human development process, not extraordinary or necessarily arising out of extreme hardship. This is a way of looking at resiliency as a positive asset to be developed proactively.

Masten identifies resiliency assets, which include cognitive abilities, temperament, positive self-perceptions, positive outlook on life, emotional stability, self-regulation and a sense of humor (Masten, 2001). Coutu (2002) attributes an acceptance of reality, strongly held values that contribute to a belief that life is meaningful, and an adaptability to change as contributing to the resiliency of an individual.

While Masten understands the development of resiliency in an individual as a typical component of human adaptation and development, the majority of research on resiliency has been done in the areas of clinical and developmental psychology based on analysis of predictive factors, with little work done on resilience in the workplace. Although typically thought of as a reactive capacity, resiliency can be thought of as proactive in that it allows for growth and learning (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Resilient individuals exhibit attributes of problem solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose (Bernard, 1991, 1993). Luthans broadens the application to fit the workplace with resiliency being identified as the “capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure, or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility” (F. Luthans, 2002b, p. 702). The need for bouncing back to at least return to an equilibrium point is important for resilient individuals; setbacks are used as springboards for growth.

Workplace development of resilience skills have included components of asset-focused strategies, risk-focused strategies, process-focused strategies (Youssef & Luthans, 2010), learning to avoid negative thinking, evaluation of the accuracy of beliefs about problems and possible solutions, and the development of calming and focusing skills to be utilized in times of stress (F. Luthans, et al., 2004; Reivich & Shatte, 2002). These components were integrated in the PsyCap intervention study (F. Luthans, et al., 2006) discussed earlier.

Self-efficacy.

Alfred Bandura's (Bandura, 1977, 1997) work on self-efficacy in the context of social cognitive theory is the most recognized cornerstone in this area. Bandura conceptualized self-efficacy as an individual's estimation that he / she can take on and succeed at a particular task. Self-efficacy "refers to an individual's conviction (or confidence) about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context" (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998b, p. 66). Self-efficacy does not refer to the actual skills one has or to the perception of one's skills but rather to the individual's belief of what can be done with their skills under certain conditions, their ability to influence the environment and reach successful outcomes. Self-efficacy is concerned with an individual's beliefs about being able to organize skills and abilities in challenging situations (Maddux, 2005). While Bandura and others do not use "self-confidence" and "efficacy" interchangeably, in the field of Positive Psychology they are often used synonymously (Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007).

Self-efficacy is not a de-contextualized trait; it can be developed situationally (Bandura, 1997, 2000). Consistent with the underlying tenets of PsyCap, self-efficacy is domain specific, not generalized. It is variable and able to be influenced by others. Highly efficacious individuals set high goals for themselves and self-select into difficult tasks, welcome and thrive on challenge, are highly motivated, invest the energy needed to achieve their goals and persevere when faced with obstacles (F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007). Stajkovic and Luthans (1998a) conducted a meta-analysis of the research on the

impact of efficacy and gains in job performance and derived a strong predictive correlation between the two variables. This work was confirmed by a meta-analysis undertaken by Bandura and Locke (2003) which showed a strong relationship between efficacy and performance and motivation. Efficacy contributes to performance under stress, most likely as related to feelings of control over the situation, task complexity analysis, and situational factors in the work environment (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998a).

Self-efficacy can be developed through experiences of success and positive feedback (Bandura, 1997, 2000; F. Luthans & Youssef, 2004). In the workplace, an efficacy building intervention would include real, vicarious, or imaginary mastery experiences that require perseverance, complex tasks, and cognitive processing, social or verbal persuasion, and recognition of psychological and physiological factors that affect job performance (F. Luthans, et al., 2004; Maddux, 2005).

Eustress: Stress Positively Oriented

In recent years, Hans Selye's (1974) concept of eustress is beginning to be examined; researchers have begun to examine the potential of positive stress and the positive effects of stress and to explore why some individuals actually reap benefits from stressful situations. Edwards and Cooper's early work (1988) defines eustress as "a positive discrepancy between an individual's perceived state and desired state, provided that the presence of this discrepancy is considered important by the individual" (p. 1448). The implication is that stressors may provide benefit or meaning to an individual.

Selye (1974) conceptualized stress as an interaction between the individual and the environment. His early work very briefly describes a concept of “eustress” (eu from Greek meaning “good”), in which the individual uses stress as a motivator, as a means of recognizing the importance of the stressor in creating urgency for task completion or reaching a goal.

The study of eustress is still in its infancy. Some of the early work involved outdoor adventure programs and the measurement of eustress, distress, and fear before and after an activity such as bungee jumping (Henning, Laschefski, & Opper, 1994) or ropes course programs (Priest, 1992). These studies differed in their measurement tools with Priest using a survey concerned with perceptions of risk and Henning et al. measuring levels of cortisol and β -endorphins, physiological indicators of anxiety and pleasurable emotions. Both studies contributed to the construct of eustress as separately identifiable from distress and not simply the absence of distress. Eustress is described as desirable and to be savored by an individual, as contrasted with distress, which is typically to be coped with and ideally moved on from.

To date, however, eustress has not been fully defined. Additionally, there is no single measurement tool that has been used. Researchers have drawn components from a variety of scales that measure perceived stress, job satisfaction, etc. in order to describe or measure components of eustress. The description of eustress has, however, begun to evolve over recent decades. Current exploration of stress as a positive construct is firmly rooted in the Positive Psychology movement described above, which attempts to study strengths and assets in situations and to examine how individuals leverage assets for control and benefit (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Quick, Quick, Nelson & Hurrell (1997) described eustress as the effects of stress being channeled into positive and constructive outcomes, including good health and high performance. Nelson and Simmons (2003) further refine an understanding of eustress by conceptualizing it as “positive aspects of the stress response itself rather than positive effects of the stress response” (p. 100, underlining added), moving from considering only the effects to considering the actual response. At this time, eustress can be minimally defined as a positive psychological response to a stressor as indicated by positive psychological states, e.g., attitudes or emotions such as positive affect, meaningfulness, and hope (as contrasted with distress, a negative psychological response to a stressor with negative psychological states, e.g., a negative affect) (Nelson & Simmons, 2004).

Eustress and distress are not to be understood as ends of a continuum but rather as distinct constructs that may work in tandem. An individual who uses their assets in valuing stress and its potential also uses positive appraisal and coping strategies to a degree in the moment (Edwards & Cooper, 1988). Positive and negative responses to stressors likely occur together but are separate, distinct, multi-variant, and likely interacting (Nelson & Simmons, 2003) with different physiological and psychological indicators (Edwards & Cooper, 1988).

This may be the point of overlap between Folkman’s theories of meaning-focused coping and positive emotion coping and eustress but they are not understood to be interchangeable constructs. Eustress is correlated with health, well-being and positive job performance as contrasted with coping by managing negative reactions and outcomes or finding something positive in the negative. Acknowledging that the stress response is complex, it is likely that in any given situation individuals utilize both distress and

eustress responses. Eustress “reflects the extent to which cognitive appraisal of a situation is seen to either benefit an individual or enhance his or her well-being” (Nelson & Simmons, 2003, p. 104). For the purposes of this study, eustress will be considered from the perspective of both the reaction to a stressor (process) and the outcome of that reaction (product) but will not be operationalized as simply the absence of distress.

Several studies have examined the eustressful response in highly demanding job situations, including those in which nurses experience the dying and death of a patient (Simmons & Nelson, 2001) and soldiers participating in a US peacekeeping mission in Bosnia (Britt, Adler, & Bartone, 2001). In each of these instances, although the nature of the work brings about demanding conditions, the workers found meaning in their work, which elicited a positive response to the work demands.

Researchers have begun to look for and describe indicators of eustress. Although there is not a definitive list of indicators, all those that have been identified are positive psychological states, with different researchers focusing on different states as indicators of eustress. Some examples to include are hope (Snyder, 2002), engagement (Britt, et al., 2001; Simmons & Nelson, 2001), hardiness (Britt, et al., 2001), a positive affect (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000a), and meaningfulness (Nelson & Simmons, 2003).

Engagement

Engagement is an often-cited outcome of eustress, the positive response to stress. “Eustressed workers are engaged, meaning that they are enthusiastically involved in and

pleasurably occupied by the demands of the work at hand” (Nelson & Simmons, 2003, p. 103). Engaged employees are characterized by a positive, work-related state of mind, filled with vigor, dedication, absorption and “have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities” (LeBlanc, deJonge, & Schaufeli, 2008, p. 124). The concept of engagement is similar to that of flow but differs in the duration of commitment. Flow typically refers to more short term focused attention, clear mind, mind and body connection, and intrinsic enjoyment than engagement. Engaged employees have values that match those of the organization. Engaged employees take initiative and create their own positive feedback loops, look for challenges, are active agents in their jobs, and are committed to doing a good job.

Nelson and Simmons (2004) also discuss the concept of savoring as related to eustress. They believe that individuals not only experience eustress but actually savor it, experiencing it in ways similar to athletes who describe themselves as “in the zone” or artists who recognize flow and connection with their audience. In organizations this might be parallel to work engagement.

While the concept of burnout has been widely studied and written about, work engagement is just beginning to more fully emerge, in both depth and breadth of studies. Engagement has been seen as the opposite of burnout but, most recently, there is an exploration of it as a separate concept with some speculation that an individual could possibly even experience some components of both burnout and engagement at the same time. Therefore, like some of the other constructs applicable to this study, it seems fitting to look at engagement as an independent concept and not necessarily a continuum existing between burnout and engagement. Work engagement is important to

organizations because “engaged employees often experience positive emotions, including happiness, joy and enthusiasm; experience better health; create their own job and personal resources; and transfer their engagement to others” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 215). Specifically in the field of education, engagement has been found to be predictive of organizational commitment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and classroom performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010).

Engagement is “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). Vigor is illustrated by high levels of energy and resilience and persistence in the face of difficulty; dedication refers to experiencing pride, inspiration, significance, and challenge in one’s work (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008). Absorption refers to being engrossed in one’s work but is distinguished from workaholism in that absorbed employees feel good when they are working and workaholics feel bad when they are not. Workaholism is characterized by a compulsive work drive which differs from absorption in one’s work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011).

Engaged employees find their work challenging and are connected to it in meaningful ways, often as an incorporation into their identity. May et al. (2004) organize the concepts incorporated in work engagement as having a physical component, an emotional component, and a cognitive component which correspond to Schaufeli et al.’s (2002) vigor, dedication and absorption.

The affective and discretionary energy and effort that are directed towards motivated work and the organization in an engaged employee is the result of traits, states,

and behavioral orientations, according to a literature review conducted by Macey and Schneider (2008). While some authors in their meta-analysis focus more strongly on the energy incorporated into work or the identification of a work role, most scholars agree that there is an energy dimension and strong identification with one's work that characterize engagement.

The literature on engagement often points to work conditions, aligning the determination of psychological states to variables in the workplace such as job clarity and relevance, opportunities for growth and development, rewards and recognition, variety, challenge, autonomy, and the supportiveness of supervisors and co-workers. A qualitative study of engagement in nurses that included focus groups of both middle management and staff nurses identified workload, control, reward, fairness, community and alignment of values as facilitators of and barriers to engagement (Freeney & Tiernan, 2009). Many of these factors are the same as those often identified as stressors in studies that examine stress.

The Job Demands-Resources model is often cited as a framework for studying work engagement. This framework uses insights from Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources theory in which an individual accrues resources to be used in times of crisis. In the Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), factors in the workplace can be categorized as demands or resources. Resources serve as a buffer between job demands and exhaustion (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007).

The role of resources acting as a buffer is the distinguishing characteristic between the Conservation of Resources theory and the Job-Resources Demands model. Demands are the aspects of the job that require physical or mental effort, thus are associated by the individual as a cost; they include physical, social, and organizational aspects of a job. Job demands are only negative, however, if they exceed the employees capability in meeting them.

Resources are the physical, social and organizational aspects of work that function in goal achievement, getting the job done, reducing job demands (extrinsic role) or stimulating personal growth (intrinsic role). Job resources promote goal achievement. Resources, which are expanded to include personal resources in the concept of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and the Job-Demands Resources model, serve to buffer job demands and exhaustion or burnout.

Crawford, LePine and Rich's work (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of the international research on engagement to examine how work demands and resources function as antecedents of engagement or burnout. Their review showed that the amount of demand is not necessarily a predictor of lack of engagement or burnout (Crawford, et al., 2010), but the assessment of the demands as a challenge, as opposed to as a hindrance, was consistently related to engagement. This research suggests that challenge demands may result in positive outcomes. Some of the language used with regards to assessment of demands is very similar to the language used in describing stress and stress responses and provides the basis for this study in looking at the personal resources involved in work engagement and dealing with stressors or work demands.

Bakker, Demerouti, Hakanen, & Xanthopoulou's (2007) study of a representative sample of teachers in Finland, using a self-report questionnaire, shows that under adverse conditions (e.g. disruptive student behavior), the job resources of supervisor support, innovativeness, appreciation, and organizational climate buffer the job demands and negative impact of student misbehavior. Their study shows that job resources are particularly relevant under stressful work conditions. This study will look at PsyCap resources under similar conditions to examine the role they may play in buffering job demands and enhancing engagement.

Quantity and quality of resources, including personal resources, have been shown to have a positive relationship with engagement. Personal resources and positive self-evaluation of resources contribute to resiliency, goal-setting, higher performance and satisfaction (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003; Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005). Using a self-report electronic questionnaire with employees at an electrical engineering company in the Netherlands, Xanthopoulou et al.'s (2007) study, for example, looked at the personal resources of self-efficacy and organizational self-esteem as mediating exhaustion and engagement. Most significantly the study revealed that employees who are confident about their capabilities and optimistic about the future, identify aspects of their work environment that contribute to their success. Additionally, personal resources were found to have a negative relationship with exhaustion, suggesting that employees with personal resources such as self-efficacy may be more resilient to difficult work conditions. A limitation to this particular study is that it looks at only one point in time.

In another study, the reverse relationship was examined to see if engagement facilitates the development of job and personal resources (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). This study contributes support to Hobfoll's theory that people actively acquire resources to have available for times of need. This study asks if engaged employees are generating resource caravans, resources generating other resources, to utilize at a future time. The same population as noted in the previous study was used but this data came from evaluation of responses at a second time interval two years later. Their data indicated a reciprocal relationship between resources and engagement; that is, engaged employees both utilize resources to reach goals and acquire resources to further generate engagement. The results of this study suggest that employees who are self-efficacious and optimistic are most likely to exhibit work engagement and that these processes are reciprocal and dynamic (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009), but it does not show that the acquisition of resources generates higher levels of engagement. This study will contribute the perspective of PsyCap as a resource used in responding to challenge demands or stressors.

Engagement has been measured primarily using quantitative measures, most often the self-report Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). This scale assesses the three components of engagement: vigor, dedication and absorption. In their 2006 work, Schaufeli, et al. analyzed studies from 10 countries with over 14,500 participants across a wide range of occupational fields to look at the utility of using only some parts of the UWES to effectively describe engagement and its relationship with burnout. They were able to shorten the instrument, but more importantly as a result of looking at longitudinal studies were able to describe engagement as a

chronic rather than a transient state. They were able to extrapolate that engaged workers are efficacious but were not able to establish if engagement is a result of efficaciousness or is caused by an employee's sense of efficacy.

Employee engagement is clearly a desired outcome in the workplace. This study will attempt to look at the resources used by engaged teachers in maintaining a level of engagement in work situations with high levels of stressors.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Methodology

Although relatively recent concepts, some work in understanding eustress and psychological capital has been done quantitatively, through surveys and rating scales. These quantitative studies have produced data that is detached from individuals, data that summarizes and conglomerates the experiences of individuals into phrases or responses that are generic or operationalized to encompass a range of understandings and experiences of a phenomenon. In this study, I examine the concepts in context: as such it is important to situate the understandings of the concepts within the understanding of the individual.

The choice of methodology used depends on what one wants to know. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe the objectives of qualitative research as:

The qualitative researchers' goal is to better understand human behavior and experience. They seek to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are. They use empirical observation because it is with concrete incidents of human behavior that investigators can think more clearly and deeply about the human condition (p. 38).

In this case subjective and idiographic knowledge is valued as the individual experiences, when well narrated, can give insight numerous aspects of into the phenomenon without forcing experiences into pre-determined boxes. An understanding of individual cases can provide support for the development of the concepts through the

voice of personal experience (Bailey, 2007; Creswell, 2003; Schram, 2006). Therefore, a qualitative study, inductive in nature, can lend specific examples of how professionals may recognize, describe, or incorporate eustressful responses to the stressors inherent in their work, relying on the words of the participants to give expanded details. A qualitative study gives voice to teachers' experiences allowing individuals to use their own words to describe their life experiences and how their experiences have impacted their views or how their values are integrated in their work. A qualitative study recognizes that individuals draw their interpretations and assign meaning based on a variety of remembered experiences, bits of information, beliefs, knowledge, dispositions, commitments, cultural norms, and tasks at hand (Carter & Doyle, 1996). It was expected that the collection of data in the form of their stories would lend specific descriptors to the varied meanings of the constructs being studied, eustress and psychological capital.

A constructivist approach in collecting and interpreting the data is based on the belief that there are multiple meanings in situations and that individuals construct their own meaning based on their social and historical perspectives (Bailey, 2007; Creswell, 2003; Schram, 2006; Willis, 2007). Approaching data from an interpretive paradigm is based on the belief that knowledge is contextual, constructed by individuals as they interpret their world and experience social interactions in the world. Meaning in situations is constructed through engagement and interaction with the world around oneself. A qualitative, constructivist approach was used in the study to recognize the power of voice and personal agency, add value, and personalize individuals' descriptions of the constructs of eustress and psychological capital, based in the belief that "the basic

generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of the interaction with a human community” (Creswell, 2003, p. 9).

Additionally, although quantitative data has been gathered with regards to eustress and psychological capital across a variety of professions, to date no studies have been done in the field of education. This study adds to the knowledge base by expanding the scholarship already in existence to include the experiences of teachers in public school settings at this time in American society and includes the qualitative nuances of the relevant concepts. The constructivist nature of the study positions the data within the specific context of the work lives of the participants at this point in time.

The notion of the teacher’s voice is important in that it carries the tone, the language, the quality, the feelings, that are conveyed by the way the teacher speaks or writes. In a political sense the notion of the teacher’s voice addresses the right to speak and be represented. It can represent both the unique individual and the collective voice; one that is characteristic of teachers as compared to other groups (Butt, Raymond, McCue, & Yamagishi, 1992, p. 57).

This qualitative study was based in life history interviews, exploring the life stories of teachers within the context of their work, including their priorities and social relations (Goodson, 1992). Life history interviews explore questions related to:

Who are you? What are you? Why are you? Why do you think, believe, do, make sense of the world and the things that happen to you, as you do? ... Why has your life taken the course that it has? Where is it likely to go?... What are the influences upon your life and what influence and impact do you have?... How do you story your life? Why do you story it in this way? What resources do you employ in assembling your life story? (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 1)

The narrative data was derived from the stories of teachers working in the field of education, based on their experiences in coming to the profession and in engaging in the

professional work of teaching within the structures of our current public education paradigm. Life histories are grounded in personal stories but emphasis is placed on the contexts that influence what the participant values and finds meaning within (Carter & Doyle, 1996). Britzman (1986) puts forth that linking life experiences with history allows:

the individual critical insight into both the nature of her/his relationships to individuals, institutions, cultural values, and political events and the ways in which these social relationships contribute to the individual's identity, values, and ideological perspectives (p. 452.)

In this research project, the life history interviews attempt to get at broad concepts of the perception of stressors in this profession and the participants' interpretation of and incorporation of those stressors into the meaning of their work contextualized in the public schools of today. Again as contrasted with quantitative studies, this qualitative study engages the participants in inquiry into their world, not an inquiry about their world. The inquiry was conducted with them, not on them.

Looking at the constructs of stress experienced by teachers, eustress and psychological capital, qualitatively gives insight into how some individuals approach their world. It shows some depth to the experiences of some individuals but does not intend to seek out all of the possibilities. This would be impossible given the focus on the historical and social context that teachers bring to their work. The influence of our historical and social context is different for all of us so each of our experiences and interpretation are uniquely different. This research looks in some depth at some individuals and their assets, exploring some descriptions for incorporating stress into positive meaning-making but does not seek to find out all possibilities. As the data

collection does not seek to be exhaustive or generalizable (Bailey, 2007; Creswell, 2003; Schram, 2006), insight can be gained by looking in depth at the experiences of some individuals. A detailed analysis of the experiences and meaning-making of a few individuals can get at a nuanced, detailed, and contextualized understanding of the concepts that will enable educators to think differently about how stressors are implicated and encompassed in the lives of educators.

Research Methods

Approval for the study was sought and obtained from the Institutional Review Board of DePaul University (see Appendix A). A snowball sampling strategy was used to recruit the participants for this study. I have been employed locally in schools for many years and as a result have worked in a wide variety of capacities with many different teachers and administrators. A number of those individuals have been the inspiration for this study; they have been the people who have caused me to wonder how and why some educators are able to incorporate our common stressors into their work in ways that add urgency and importance instead of personal burden. “In this type of research, informants are seldom “found”; rather they emerge in the course of one’s everyday activities” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 85). I began with individuals I currently know who meet a descriptive criterion (see Appendix B) and, in the course of the interview process asked them and other respected professional contacts to help in the identification of other educators with similar qualities to approach for participation.

The participants in this study were seasoned teachers with at least five years of teaching experience; most of their experience has been classroom based as opposed to working in support positions. The participants were limited to those who work in the public sector, not in private schools. The reason for focusing on public schools was to include the stressors associated with public school accountability and presence of public opinion in the media, which are not found in the private sector of teaching. As expected, most of the sample was female due to the percentage of the teaching force that is female but one male participated in the study. No teacher was excluded due to sex, racial or ethnic background or age; the sample included individuals who make up a diverse group, including sex, age, ethnicity, marital status, sexual orientation and location of teaching experiences. Several people who were asked to participate declined, citing time constraints. Everyone who began the study completed it.

The stressors for each individual were not intended to be identical across the participants but categories of stressors common across situations were anticipated to include public accountability, administrative support, teacher:student interactions, and time constraints. Participants who experienced other stressors that might be site specific were able to be included since the relevance to this study is found not in identifying some stressors as more or less significant but in describing the way teachers approach incorporating their stressors, whatever they are, into their work. Additionally, the participants solicited were teachers who are involved in the school community in ways that extend beyond their classroom, e.g. those teachers who are inclined to serve on multiple committees at the school or district levels, or who are engaged in afterschool programming or community outreach or developing parent workshops, etc. The desired

participants were teachers who consistently approach their work with a positive affect and who are seen by their peers as problem solvers or idea generators. They are teachers who their supervisor does not predict burnout for because they consistently find ways to revitalize their work. While it is likely that they might also be described as “good teachers” instructionally the actual nature of their instruction was not under consideration but rather their global outlook and participation in the school community is the descriptor that is the most important.

I contacted the identified teachers by email to explain the study and solicit interest in participating in interviews about their career and the meaning of the work they engage in and to schedule a first interview. Participants were given the informed consent form via email several days in advance of the scheduled interview for their consideration and signature when they choose to participate. The consent form was collected from each individual at the beginning of the interview when it was also verbally reinforced to them that their participation was voluntary, their responses would be kept confidential, a pseudonym was used, all personally identifying information was disguised, and that their participation could be terminated by them at any time if they desired to do so. The participants were English speakers and college educated so there was no need for a consideration of language or literacy in preparing or presenting the informed consent form. The study was explained as examining how teachers came to the profession, how they view their work and its compatibility with their skills and values, and the ways in which the variables, including common stressors, inherent in teaching contribute to their day-to-day work and their perception of it.

Participants were interviewed individually and the interview audio recorded. Some notes were made during the interview about the interviewee's demeanor or questions to follow up with. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for related issues and discussion to emerge, in order to elicit and explore the perspectives of the participants as fully as possible. The interview guide contained guiding questions; questions or probes arose organically as a result of discussion and were asked in order to gain understanding of depth of ideas or experiences (see Appendix C, Interview Guide). The recording of the interview was transcribed with names, locations and any other identifying information changed to protect confidentiality. The transcripts were provided to the participant for review before coding began in order to provide opportunity for further elaboration or clarification if they desired. In that email I also introduced some preliminary ideas of the themes of their comments, some of which are reflected in the final analysis. Several provided small clarifications, one asked for part of the interview to be deleted as he felt that, even with names changed, he had revealed information he should have kept confidential, and one led to a further interview as she had considerably more to say.

The ideal location for the interview was the interviewee's school; the classroom is the most desired location as this is likely to be a comfortable location for the interviewee, their "home turf" as it were. The classroom seems to be an ideal place to help the interviewee stay grounded in the reality of teaching, to avoid romanticizing experiences. Relating experiences is more real in the natural setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Half of the interviews took place in the teacher's classroom. When it was not possible or desirable to interview the teacher in the natural setting another location was mutually

selected. Two of the interviews took place in a coffee shop and a third took place in a private room in a public library.

Each participant was interviewed across one to two interview sessions lasting up to a couple of hours in length. After the interviews were completed and transcribed, coding was used to organize data and as a tool to understand and analyze the experiences of the participants. “Coding is just a piece of the interpretive act and supports the interpretive framework” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 164). The transcripts were read thoroughly several times before coding begins. Coding was done inductively and deductively, looking for recurring threads or themes to provide coherent ways of thinking about the data. External codes (*a priori*) came from the theoretical and conceptual basis of eustress and psychological capital but additionally internal codes arose independently from the issues discussed. I coded first to see what themes arose and then applied the *a priori* codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Findings and thematic analysis are reported in subsequent chapters and reflect themes generated by both inductive and deductive coding.

Finally, I kept a journal of my own thoughts as a researcher and educator throughout the interviewing and coding process as a means of capturing my evolving thoughts that may be helpful in guiding the analysis. Recognizing that many of the topics to be discussed in the interviews are ones that affect my own day-to-day practice, it was helpful to the data interpretation for there to be an outlet for me to describe my own thoughts in order to be thoughtful in understanding the level of subjectivity that I am able to bring to this work.

Positionality

Qualitative researchers must be concerned with the influence of their own subjectivity on the generation and analysis of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). As mentioned above, in addition to the role of researcher, I bring perspective and personal meaning related to the topics being investigated both as a former urban teacher and a current suburban school administrator. I also lived with an urban classroom teacher for fifteen years so have been very close to his reactions to and understandings of the stressors of public education. In recognizing my own positionality in approaching this work the following are considerations:

- I have to recognize the role stressors in education play in my own daily work life and how I utilize them for better or worse before I can begin to hear or understand the differences in the ways others approach them.
- I have to analyze how my own path to becoming an educator, including my own interests and values, has contributed to my personal utilization of skills or assets in incorporating stressors into the meaning I make in my own work, and how I understand and respond to the urgency of my work.
- Additionally, I have to understand how I as a school administrator currently interpret the actions or attitudes of teachers in stressful situations in school so that I can understand the assumptions that this has on what I ask or hear in interviews.

All of these lenses have to be considered in each step of the research, from constructing interview questions to conducting the interviews to interpreting the data and writing the results. In order to acknowledge my own subjectivity or the influence my own

experiences have on how I see the responses of the participants, I engaged in answering the interview questions myself through journaling, in order to have a written personal account of the experiences I am inquiring into in others' lives, before beginning the interviews. Throughout the interview process I continued the journaling activity, again in order to acknowledge my own responses and commonalities or differences before beginning analysis; in this sense I can identify my own experiences and move them out of the way in order to better focus on others'. Journaling helped me to parse out my own responses in order to help focus on other's responses. I do not think it is possible, nor even one hundred percent desirable, to completely extract one's own experiences from a dialogue; putting them in writing in advance may help to detangle them from the data being gathered so that, if included, they are identified as such. The nature of qualitative research acknowledges that data is gathered in interpersonal interaction and the data is about interpersonal interaction; therefore it is impossible to completely disengage oneself as a qualitative researcher. The recognition of where one's own perspective may come into play is important.

In developing interview questions and coding and analyzing the data, I needed to start from a place that does not presume to know about another's reality, even though we may have shared or similar experiences in our work. Recognizing that one is never "just a researcher" but brings one's own background to a situation, it is important to not assume knowledge (Schram, 2006). For example, in the interviews I was careful in my reactions to the answers given, careful not to agree or to discuss similar experiences or to present a different point of view. This was challenging for me to be able to draw out full experiences without contributing to the discussion, especially since in my role as a school

administrator I typically participate in discussions, rarely as an observer, but most often as someone with an opinion to offer. It was necessary to review the data many times, each time being purposeful in my thinking to keep an open mind and let the data speak for itself. Journaling was a means of exploring my own connections with the data, to get that out of the way, so to speak.

Finally, it was necessary to recognize that my other role as a school administrator could impact the participants' responses and our interaction. Each teacher has had a relationship with one or more school administrators and those are never equal relationships; it must be acknowledged that one's interpretation of the unequal power dynamic between teachers and administrators may influence the relationship between the participants and me, even though my primary role in the relationship is that of a researcher. For myself, I needed to be careful to not offer commentary, advice, concurrence or dissent with a teacher's analysis, or relate similar experiences, beyond the minimum that may be needed in the establishing of rapport; again, journaling was the avenue for expressing those thoughts that were bound to arise so that the responses of the participant are the focus in analysis. Finally, construction of questions had to be careful so that the participant is compelled to give complete answers without assuming that I, as a fellow public school educator, already had a knowledge base of their situations. Were that to happen, important contextual information might not be included so probing follow-up questions and really listening to responses with an open mind are important.

Ethics and Quality

Ethical considerations in this research are embedded in the relationships established for the purposes of gathering data. Rapport had to be established between the participant teachers and me as a researcher, although with a secondary hat as a fellow educator. Establishing what I share in common with the participants was an important part of establishing rapport (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The shared role as educators was one I wished to emphasize more than my role as a school administrator in order to help participants be more at ease. I cannot, however, deny that the majority of my career has been in administration and if there appeared to be any framing of responses that were guided by my role as an administrator, that needed to be explicitly acknowledged. In a couple of instances topics of professional interest came up that the participant and I agreed to discuss outside of the interview. Most specifically were several instances in which the interviewee directly asked me about my experience or how I handle a situation. We noted them and followed up afterwards.

Another way to help put participants at ease with me was to emphasize my role in this relationship as that of a student, of a learner. This process of gathering stories from those in the field is one in which the interviewee has the information I hoped to access; as a student I have much to learn from the interviewee and that was put forth in the initial establishment of the relationship, an establishment of humility (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). There are subtle ways of building a more equal relationship including by dressing more causally or by using my personal email account to correspond as needed instead of the one with my “principal” signature.

Rapport building, or “a process of establishing trust with participants that primarily serves the needs of the researcher” (Schram, 2006, p. 139) is essential to getting reliable information, to encouraging participants to carefully consider and respond to questions genuinely. Rapport is established in interpersonal dynamics, something that I utilize in my work every day as I frequently have to put people at ease in order to gain access to information they may or may not want to share with me. The basis for rapport is often a sense of whether or not someone is trustworthy. A revisiting of the research protocols, reinforcing the idea that I am a student and there to learn from their experiences, an emphasis on the fact that as a teacher they know more about the stresses of being a teacher than I do especially as I have not been a teacher in many years, were all means of building positive interpersonal dynamics. Rapport is based upon a two-way trusting relationship (Bailey, 2007); I have to trust that the information provided is accurate and reliable and the participants had to trust that the research relationship is the primary one I brought to the relationship. Seidman (2006) summarizes the basis for rapport as “the interviewing relationship must be marked by respect, interest, attention, and good manners on the part of the interviewer” (p. 97).

The purpose of the study was transparent to the participants although the details of the strong focus on positive orientations towards stressors was not fully disclosed until after the interview so as to not influence the responses. The focus on life history interviews to understand the social and historical contexts influencing teachers approach to their work was presented first as the purpose of the study.

Finally, the participants were limited to those who engaged in the study willingly. I made it clear that they would make all decisions about their participation, and identity

would be protected by changing all identifying information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), consistent with the Institutional Review Board approval of the study.

Quality concerns in qualitative research relate to trustworthiness, encompassing concerns about credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness is established by the thoroughness of the research process (Bailey, 2007). Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are increased by thoroughly explaining data gathering procedures, presenting data transparently through use of extensive quotes, presenting instances in which the data may not fit the frameworks, acknowledging biases, explaining the analysis process, clearly expressing the relationships between data (supporting evidence) and the research findings, and maintaining a log of interactions and reactions (audit trail) (Scaife, 2004). The quality of the study was strengthened through member checking, by asking participants to review the transcripts for accuracy, as well as by asking them to comment on initial identification of themes to gather their perspective. Additionally, thick description is used throughout the reporting of findings, using many direct quotes to support analysis and to allow the stories to speak for themselves. The audit trail includes documentation of where and when the interviews, including the reasons for follow-up interviews as needed, took place as well as the journaling of the researcher. This journaling also helped to clarify and sort out the bias I brought to the study as an educator who has experienced variations of the same stressors being explored. A peer reviewer, another qualitative researcher who teaches at the university level, reviewed and provided feedback about the process and data analysis (Creswell, 2003).

The concepts of reliability and validity are not being used in this doctoral research as both are more applicable to quantitative research than qualitative. This research does not seek to find universal or transferable truths but rather to explore the concepts at the level of the experiences of some individuals. Similarities between their experiences and incorporation into personal meaning-making may or may not be found and while it is expected and hoped that the questions asked get at the information sought, different themes than expected also arose. The issue of reliability is accounted for within the fit between recorded data and the interpretation reported in the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

In summary, the research design attempted to provide the basis for gathering data from which both internal and external themes could be explored. The life-history interviews attempted to elicit description of the way in which teachers ascribe the meaning of their work as it has evolved from their experiences leading up to and throughout their life as a public school teacher in this current social structure.

Chapter 4: Participants

The results of this study are based on semi-structured life history interviews with six participants.¹ Each was identified as meeting the criteria for participation in this study as they are seasoned public school teachers with at least five years of experience, have most of their experience based in the classroom, are described as having a positive affect or outlook, are continually energized by their work, are consistently revitalizing their work by trying new things, are thought of as problem solvers, have a global outlook, are involved in the school community beyond their own classroom and are the type of teachers one thinks of nominating for awards that recognize outstanding service to the profession. Each of the participants embodies most of these criteria. Each of the descriptive summaries that follows presents demographic information, a brief description of the person's childhood, their career trajectory, some personal or professional characteristics and a brief preview of their perception of challenges and successes in their work as pertains to the findings presented in subsequent chapters.

Debbie

Debbie is a single White woman, in her mid-to-late fifties, with no children of her own. She is a veteran teacher who has taught in a variety of schools in the suburbs of a major mid-western city. Although her work has been predominantly in elementary school, she also taught middle school social studies and expresses a desire to try middle

¹ All names of participants, colleagues or others mentioned in interviews, schools, and specific cities have been changed.

school teaching again in the future. She also has a degree and experience in special education. Although she has worked predominantly in her current district, she has experience in a couple of other districts as well. She is currently teaching fourth grade, but previously served as a literacy coach and special education teacher in the district in which she currently works. Through her range of experiences, she has worked with a wide variety of colleagues, administrators, and student populations.

Debbie comes from a large working class family where there was no expectation that the girls of the family would go to college. She grew up in a large city and attended Catholic schools. While she enjoyed school, she does not identify her own experiences in school as influencing her career choice. Her elder sister insisted that she go straight from high school to college, in spite of higher education for girls not being a family priority. Debbie choose education as her major as she liked working with children, having some experience volunteering with the Special Olympics and other similar activities. While attending college, she was working in a grocery store of a large local chain and was on the fast track to move into lower management; she took a significant pay cut to accept her first teaching job.

In conversation with Debbie it is easy to see her passion for teaching and for her students' learning. She is heavily invested in her students and in finding ways for them to be successful. She enjoys the day-to-day presenting of lessons and looks for the hook for individual students. She enjoys working with families, finding the connection so that her students are successful. She is invested in developing relationships with her students, seeking ways to connect with each of them.

She is also heavily committed to her own growth as a professional. She has completed two Master's degrees, reads professional literature extensively and engages in professional dialogue and sharing with colleagues regularly. She spoke about seeking out colleagues for advice when challenges arise and forming purposeful professional relationships that support her in her work and help her explore questions that arise. She has a possible ambition to open a charter school with some of these colleagues after retirement.

Debbie was able to easily identify successes in her life and career. She identified the furthering of her own education as one of her major personal achievements. Additionally she focused on her work with specific students and groups of students as other things she is proud of in her work. She specifically identified being comfortable with change as one of her biggest assets.

Debbie identified a big challenge in her life as overcoming low self-confidence, significantly contributed to by having the condition of hyperhidrosis, a condition in which a person's palms perspire a great deal. (She had surgery to correct that condition within the past decade.) Although she spoke extensively about having low self-confidence when she was in school, she comes across as very articulate and confident in her ability to connect with students and to be an effective teacher.

In terms of job-related stress, Debbie identifies teacher evaluation as the biggest stressor in teaching these days. She feels this stressor directly impacts her because she often has difficult students placed in her class due to her skill set but the progress they make may not show in the testing data, which comprises a part of her evaluation. In spite of this, she remains confident in her ability to affect students and does not let it

compromise her daily work. She feels that “someone” needs to work on this so that teachers are not stressed out about it.

Kristine

Kristine is a married White woman, age forty-four, with no children of her own, who teaches science in a high school in a major mid-western city area. (Although it is relatively nearby this is not the same city as the majority of the rest of the participants are from.) She has worked in two schools in this city, one a neighborhood school in an impoverished neighborhood and the other a school that students apply to and are selected by lottery, not by testing, into the school. Kristine describes the first school where she taught as having “tough kids” for whom school was a safer place than the streets but education was not necessarily a priority for them. Her current school is able to place more emphasis on acquisition of content knowledge and achievement. Her current role includes some administrative duties for the freshman and sophomore classes in the area of curriculum and programming and she teaches science to juniors and seniors. She identifies moving into administration full-time as something she will probably do in the near future, not because of a desire to leave teaching but because the opportunity to work with an administrator she admires is presenting itself.

Kristine also comes from a working class family, with one sibling. She grew up in a suburb of the city she currently works in. She expressed neutral feelings about her own schooling, enjoying elementary school well enough but rebelling in high school. Her own schooling did not influence her career choice. It was presumed in her family that the

children would go to college and she did, studying biochemistry. After college she waitressed for several years before deciding to go back to school to earn a Master's degree in molecular genetics. She saw her future career working in a lab. In the Master's program she had the opportunity to teach as a lab assistant and while she enjoyed it, she did not associate her enjoyment of teaching with a career choice. She did not, however, particularly enjoy the actual lab work and now feels that if she had followed that path, she would not be happy in her work.

By happenstance, her aunt, who was a high school administrator and a major influence on her life, had a science teacher vacancy in October the year Kristine was to graduate and encouraged her to apply for it because she needed a job. She became a teacher, found her passion, and returned to school to get licensed.

Kristine sees herself as a teacher who is able to reach difficult students. She enjoys the challenge of connecting with students who have behavioral challenges. She feels she is able to meet them where they are and hold them to a standard; she feels students respect her because of her no-nonsense approach. She also emphasized the development of relationships as being key to reaching students. She works hard to present engaging lessons and feels curricular design and planning is very important.

Kristine is also dedicated to her own learning. Several times during the interview she referred to professional growth opportunities, including National Board Certification, as well as a class she teaches at a major university in the city. She emphasized the need for colleagues to work together. She did not, however, identify a network of support for herself outside of a previous administrator and her husband (who also works in the field of education). She considers herself more of a loner, as well as the person sought to give

advice at this point in her career. She is very confident in her abilities to teach students and to lead colleagues.

Kristine easily identified personal and professional successes. Her main personal success is the achievement of National Board Certification. She is proud of having persevered through the process and of being able to apply the things she learned in that process to her current work. She also identified successes in her work with challenging students. She had many examples of students who were challenging in their behavior and when she confronted them with expectations and boundaries, rose to meet her expectations and demonstrated respect for her.

Kristine identified the biggest challenge of her life thus far as her mother's mental illness. Her mother suffered from schizophrenia, which impacted Kristine's life in many ways. Today she identifies compassion as something she gained as a result of that relationship. In terms of professional stressors, Kristine identified time management as having the biggest impact on teachers, including her, today. She feels that it is hard to manage and meet the many demands of administrators and paperwork while planning and presenting engaging lessons.

Scott

Scott is a forty-five year old White man, in a long-term gay partnership, with no children of his own. He currently teaches social studies in a middle school but also has significant experience in teaching elementary school. He has worked in several suburbs of a major mid-western city.

Scott grew up in the suburbs of this city, in a middle class family, with one sibling. He liked school as a child and aspired to be a teacher. However, he decided to study business when he went to college as he equated success at that time with financial wealth. He wanted to pursue a career that was lucrative. The idea of financial prosperity defining success arose for him from situations in his childhood in which he was bullied and even sexually abused. He wanted to show others that he was capable, even better than they were, and obvious financial success was a way to prove that, according to him. He began working in the financial world in another state but quickly discovered that he was unhappy in his work. After a short time, he returned home to go to school to become certified as a teacher, pursuing his first interest. He earned a Master's degree and began teaching in the school where he did his student teaching. The majority of his experiences have been with an ethnically diverse group of middle class students.

Scott has changed grade levels and schools several times in his nineteen-year career, sometimes at his own initiative and other times at the request of an administrator. Keeping his professional perspective fresh is very important to him and he values change as a way to do so. Relationship building with students and with colleagues is a significant theme in Scott's work. He believes he is successful with students because he pushes them hard academically, not settling for mediocre work from any of his students. He believes that it is important that they believe in themselves and he provides the structures for that to happen.

Scott spoke often of his desire to help anyone who needs it with regards to professional growth or improving his or her teaching practice. He believes teachers can and should get ideas from each other and support each other. He described very positive

professional relationships that are based in partnership with colleagues, administrators and parents. Scott serves as the union steward for his school. He seeks out opportunities for professional development, again with the eye on keeping his work evolving.

All of Scott's successes were focused on his students. He described several instances in which it was clear that he had built a strong community in his classroom that allowed students to care for one another in a very genuine way. He described situations with students in which they struggled but were successful beyond their own expectations. Scott has also struggled with some large issues in his life. He was bullied and sexually abused as a child. Those events could have brought him a different outlook in life but he sought therapy and has overcome their lasting negative effects. When asked if we can overcome most of our challenges, he responded:

Yes. I totally ... going through the things that I have, I guess I've kind of come up with this quote where tragedy leads to success. You turn tragedy into success ... And the thing is that you've gotta use what's happened as a motivational to make things better.

He described other personal challenges in which he had to be reflective and to decide on a course towards growth; one example had to do with a challenging course in writing in which he was pushed beyond his own expectations but was eventually successful. In his own work, Scott identified the currently evolving system of teacher evaluation as challenging but, differently from other participants, he identified it in a larger political landscape and the challenges of impacting its evolution from that standpoint.

Lori

Lori Sanchez is a Latina who is thirty-five years old, married to a White man, and with no children of her own. She teaches elementary school in the suburbs of a major mid-western city. She has taught the lower elementary grades in bilingual classrooms in three schools, in two different districts. She works with all Hispanic students, mostly from low-income homes.

Lori was born and grew up in Puerto Rico, coming to the United States for a year to study English when she was fifteen and returning to do a Master's degree in her early twenties. She has a half-sister and a very close relationship with her grandparents in Puerto Rico and aunt (who recently passed away) and uncle here in the United States. She is very close to her mother and step-father. Her family was middle class and she described a very happy childhood in which she loved school and wanted to become a teacher. She described playing teacher at home often.

However, when she went to college, Lori studied human resources. She stated that teaching is not seen as an admirable or desirable profession in Puerto Rico. She felt completely out of her element in her human resources classes and eventually decided to drop out of school. Her aunt demanded that she stay in school but that she pursue what she was interested in, which was education. After graduating she came to the United States to pursue a Master's degree in Reading, not, she stated, to become a reading specialist but rather because she felt all of her students should have a teacher who is an expert in the teaching of reading.

Lori is passionate about being a good teacher and about her children's lives and their families. She feels her life can serve as a positive example for her students of hard work leading to success. She sees herself as a community resource and an example of the success her students can have. She states that she spends all of her time and energy thinking about how to be a better teacher and how to provide her students with the experiences they need. She works to ensure that all students get her attention, not just those who are struggling academically.

Lori easily identified both successes and challenges, although they were often intertwined in the discussion. For example, she identified her own personal struggle with achieving a level of English proficiency that would allow her to graduate with her Master's degree. She was sent back for remediation and was not able to graduate as expected even though she was achieving in her classes. This was a humiliating experience for her and caused her to have to rely on her colleagues to help her rewrite papers and check her work. While this was a big challenge, she also identifies it as one of her most proud moments, specifically when she realized a piece she had written was good enough without being checked.

In her professional life now, Lori identifies the biggest stressor as too much testing. She feels that the amount of testing students are engaged in does not serve a strong enough purpose to take away the instructional time needed. She is frustrated by how little control she has over that aspect.

Fiona

Fiona is a White woman in her mid-thirties, married to an African American man, with whom she has a teenage son. She teaches elementary school in a suburb of a major city in the Midwest. Currently she teaches second grade but she has previously taught kindergarten in the same school. This is the only school she has taught in, and she hopes to retire from this school as well. The school she teaches in serves a diverse student body with some students coming from very wealthy homes and others, who are bused in, coming from a neighborhood with much fewer resources.

Fiona was born and raised in the eastern United States in a working class family. She has one sibling and a close relationship with her parents. Her early years were spent living on a farm but when she was in third grade her family moved to “town”, a small city. She recalls liking school but does not connect that with her eventual career choice. In her family there was not an emphasis placed on academics; she states that her parents would have been on board with whatever she had chosen to do after high school. She decided to attend college near home immediately following high school and studied dance. After college, she married and soon after had her son. She stayed at home with him for the first couple of years but eventually began working in a day care center for financial reasons and because she could bring her son to work with her. When her son was about four, the family moved to the Midwest to be closer to her husband’s family. When they settled in the Midwest, she took a retail job but was searching for something more satisfying to do. At the advice of family members she went back to school to become a teacher, earning a Master’s degree. She was immediately employed at the school she works at now.

The passion Fiona brings to teaching is evident when one speaks with her. Being a teacher is a big part of her identity. Like many of the other participants, Fiona identifies relationships as being crucial to her success as a teacher. She places a heavy emphasis on finding ways to reach students so that they see their potential.

Fiona is also deeply committed to her own professional growth and improving her teaching practice. She works hard to refine the areas she sees as her strengths, most specifically in the area of writing instruction, and to share her knowledge base with her colleagues. She spoke often of the professional reading she does, particularly throughout the summer months. Although she has only worked in one school and hopes to retire from that same school some day, she also identified the need for change to keep her practice fresh. Several years ago she asked to change grade levels because she felt that a change would help her to continue to be reflective about the instructional choices she makes. She researches and tries new instructional strategies easily. She stated that she would never leave teaching to pursue any other line of work.

When asked to identify successes, Fiona tied her personal successes with her professional successes. She spoke about her pride in the young man that her son is becoming and her careful parenting choices that have helped to put him on this path. She is similarly careful and deliberate in her interactions with her students, carefully laying a foundation so that they know they are cared for and believed in in very specific ways. Fiona's challenges are also relationship based; the biggest current challenge in her life is raising a teenage son and guiding and accepting the choices he makes. Similarly in her classroom, she spoke about a student she felt she was never able to connect with and the sadness that brought her. She was surprised when the student and his mother came to visit

with her in the year after he was in her class because she felt she had never “hooked” him, had failed to make a genuine connection.

In terms of job-related stress, Fiona identified testing and evaluation as sources of stress for teachers today, saying:

The testing is a lot; I mean we go from, and I’m sure you know this of course, but we go from ISELs to DRA to then MAP² and I felt like for two, almost three weeks, am I teaching? And that’s a struggle, you know it feels like so much time that’s not involved in rich experiences and I know that the testing is important and I know that we have to gather the data but it feels frustrating for the time that’s given to us.

Violet

Violet is a White woman in her later fifties who is married with three grown children. She identified herself as a Christian and spoke about her Christian values often during the interview. She teaches special education in a semi-rural area. She grew up in the same area she currently lives in and has several siblings who live relatively nearby. Both of Violet’s parents were teachers in the same community, although they are retired now. Violet always knew she wanted to follow in her parents’ footsteps and be a teacher. She spoke at length of always wanting to help her parents grade papers while she was growing up and visiting their classrooms. None of her siblings had the same desire.

Violet married and had her first child when she was eighteen and began attending college in the evenings. Going to school part time and parenting, it took her eight years to earn her Bachelor’s degree. After receiving her degree, she stayed at home with her

² Illinois Snapshot of Early Literacy, Developmental Reading Assessment, Measure of Academic Progress—all tests of student progress, administered throughout the course of the school year

children for a number of years. When it was time for her first teaching job, she interviewed and was hired into the classroom position her mother was moving out of. On the day of the interview with this researcher, her retired mother was the substitute teacher in Violet's classroom. Violet has always worked at the same school and sees herself retiring from there, possibly in the next five years or so. Her experiences as she described them had a very small-town feeling, with many inter-connected people and parts.

When she retires, Violet would like to work with pre-service teachers, expressing that she feels her experiences as a teacher would give her a lot to offer those coming into the profession. She was not, however, optimistic about the opportunities for new teachers, talking quite a bit about the pressures teachers face that cause them to leave the profession. She stressed that if one was not 100% passionate about being a teacher, they would not make it in the profession for long. In discussing whether she would advise young people to go into the profession, she said:

And I'm not so sure, I don't know. I don't know if I would steer, unless you have that burning desire and love... which, I did but it's a tough profession to go into now with everything.

Currently Violet works in the capacity of an interventionist. She implements prescribed scripted lessons in response to data that says a child is struggling in a particular area. She expressed that this work does not let her be creative and could be done by someone with less education than she has but she does find it rewarding to help the children who need extra support and to be a part of the process of identification of learning disabilities.

Violet also talked about professional growth as being a priority for her. She earned her Master's degree seven years ago with a cohort group from her school. She spoke about being revitalized by attending conferences to hear new ideas and get new strategies; this is important for her so that she does not become stagnant in her work. She feels that professional growth should be a priority for all teachers and expressed some frustration that not everyone seeks out growth opportunities.

Although she spent considerable time in the interviews discussing some of the very large challenges her district and school are facing right now, Violet stated that she does continue to like her job:

Well, any more I think if you walk out of school and you still have a positive attitude ... and this year has been really kind of trying for that. I guess I measure my success one kid at a time. Like, you know, where we're at, am I meeting their needs and do I feel fulfilled do I walk out at night and know I'm doing a good thing. Do I drive to school in the morning and say I can't wait for the day to start? Those are the kinds of things. I mean I've yet to wake up with dreading what I do. Now granted I like those vacation ... you know, spring break ... almost here ... whoa hoo ... but, you know, I still love my job so I guess right there it measures something ...

She talked about pervasive perceptions of colleagues that special education teachers have a lighter load because they only work with a few students at a time as being things she has to confront every day.

Violet was very pleasant to talk with and generally presented topics in a positive light, expressing that she sees herself as a positive thinker and an optimist. Throughout the conversation there were, however, continuous references to several stressors. Teacher evaluation and the pension crisis in her State were obviously at the forefront of her thoughts as pertaining to her work. She seemed to acutely feel anxiety and frustration

with regards to these two topics, in the ways that they are not fair to teachers. The two topics were expressed as very personal to her and were woven throughout the conversation, although she says they do not impact her work in the classroom on a day-to-day basis.

Table 1 presents an overview of the participants in this study.

Table 1: An overview of the participants

	<u>Demographic Info</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Feelings re Own Schooling</u>	<u>Came to Teaching</u>	<u>Biggest Personal Challenge</u>	<u>If/When Left Teaching Would...</u>	<u>Biggest Stressor Currently</u>
Debbie	Early fifties, White, female, single, no children, suburban elementary teacher	2 Masters	Neutral; liked elementary, bored in HS	Directly; but not a childhood ambition	Self-confidence	Write children's books	Teacher Evaluation
Kristen	44, White, female, married, no children, urban high school teacher	2 Masters	Neutral; liked elementary, rebelled in HS	Indirectly; not a childhood ambition	Mother's mental illness	Policy work	Time Management
Scott	45, White, male, gay partnership, no children, suburban middle school teacher	Masters	Neutral; liked elementary, bullied in HS	Indirectly; was a childhood ambition	Bullied, sexually abused	Own an educational business, or policy work	Teacher Evaluation, Politics
Lori	35, Latina, female, married, no children, suburban elementary teacher	Masters	Positive; always liked school	Indirectly; was a childhood ambition	Mastering English	Day care for teachers' children	Too Much Testing, Teacher Evaluation
Fiona	Mid thirties, White, female, married, one child, suburban elementary teacher	Masters	Liked school	Indirectly; was not a childhood ambition	Parenting a teen	Would not leave teaching	Too Much Testing; Teacher Evaluation; Time Management
Violet	Later fifties, White, female, married, three children, rural elementary special education teacher	Masters	Neutral	Directly; was a childhood ambition	None Identified	Supervise student teachers	Teacher Evaluation; Pension

Demographically, the participants in the study are mostly White and mostly women but with some diversity in that a Latina and a man are included. All are educated at the Masters level in their field, with two of the participants having earned two Masters

degrees. There is a mix of whether they came to teaching as a career directly from college, directly as something they wanted since childhood or indirectly having been diverted before becoming a teacher, or indirectly by chance or circumstance. The challenges and stressors related by the individuals reflect the complexities of personal life that teachers bring to school with them and the challenges of professional life that contribute to their days at school. The dedication of these individuals to their profession is evident in the alternate careers each would choose if they left teaching; in every case those careers would still be related to education. In every case, the life history related by the participants gave insight into their successes, struggles, values and changes over time.

Chapter 5: Findings – Meaning Making

This chapter addresses several themes that arose inductively from the data to contribute to the understandings to be derived from this study. These include the centrality of relationship building with students in the teacher's meaning-making, the importance of professional growth and change in contributing to work engagement, and the challenges faced by teachers. Chapter Six examines the data deductively with regards to the four constructs of Psychological Capital (hope, optimism, resiliency and self-efficacy). In both of the examinations of the data, there also arose an interesting point of comparison between the similarities most of the participants presented in meaning construction and the way in which one of the participants, Violet, constructs meaning, which is mentioned throughout the findings but explored more in depth in Chapter Seven, Discussion. This contrast seems to lend support to the interaction of the constructs of psychological capital in work engagement and eustress.

Relationships in the Work with Children

None of the interview questions directly asked the teachers about students. However, all of the participants clearly identified their work with their students as the most central and rewarding part of their job, the basis for their work engagement. This would be an expected theme in talking to teachers. Most of the participants, with the exception of Violet, however, consistently expounded on their work with children as

based in the specific relationships they cultivate with their students. Those relationships are absolutely foundational to their work and to their identity as a teacher as exemplified in these parts of the interviews:

It's a great feeling to know that I can connect with kids and that I can create the sense of belonging for kids and, you know, I tell kids at the very beginning even if you don't learn anything else, if you learn how to be kind to each other it's gonna be a better world. And they are always like by the end of fourth grade...when I say integrity they're like Oh God, Miss S ... So that's very rewarding for me. Just, you know, bopping through the school and giving a kid a high-five by his locker... that's very rewarding because I think that there is, those kids look forward to it every day; meeting each one by their locker and saying, hey – and how was yesterday? You had a basketball game yesterday; you know, and just having that connection with them...(Debbie)

I mean many people would say you know why not, you know, you're gonna become an administrator right? And I'm like absolutely not because it's more..., not that you don't get interaction with kids, I still like that. You know even though I have 120 kids I can still have that, you know. (Scott)

Relationships were described more prominently and as more important than the actual learning the teachers were able to facilitate. The participants seem to have an understanding that without well-developed relationships they would not be able to effectively teach their students. Each was confident in their ability to develop good lessons and instruct but, to them, their work is firmly grounded and based in individual relationships; none discussed their students' achievements or learning without directly referencing the relationship that allows that learning to happen. The quotes below from the interviews are representative of the types of comments made:

I taught 5th grade. That district, I loved it; the problem was they were changing their philosophy. They were getting into a business model where they wanted us to start looking at kids as customers and I had and was like ahhh. Kids aren't customers. They're humans. They're not and I knew it was time to go. (Scott)

Oh, really I think it's making that connection more of a personal connection and I also think that I continue to keep rigor in the classroom and that parents talk to me about that and they're like ohhh all of a sudden 4th grade is so much more rigorous. Well, yeah, I don't want to say, it shouldn't be....(Debbie)

In describing themselves as teachers, the responsibility for the building of strong relationships with their students, and in some cases with their parents as well, was a heavily recurring theme. Having a relationship that communicates expectations, support and a desire to know the learner as a person was clearly strived for by these teachers and serves as the basis for the instructing they do. Lori said,

I want that every day is a good day for them and a good day where they can go home and be happy about coming back and hate vacations ... I never celebrate it's Friday. I never do it. I never say in front of kids, "ohh I'm so happy it's Friday". I don't do it. I never, I always feel I'm going to miss you guys so much on the weekend and they get used to that being Friday is not like ... ohhh fine I'm out of here, you know. I don't let anybody tell the kids, you know, anytime – even vacations ... I'm like oh, yes, rest – you know, now you can do things you cannot do but it's always kind of sad because I don't like that they celebrate "ohhh finally we're [out of here]"... Like we're trapped! So I never do. I always make it like well you know we have this little poem but I said the other day and it's always, you know ... although I saw you the day before yesterday and yesterday and today this much is true – I'm going to see you tomorrow, too, so then we say on Fridays I'm going to see you on Monday, too. So we always say it every day because I'm like *I want to see you*. I want to see you so make sure you're safe because I'm going to be waiting, you know ...

The building of relationships was described as both a challenge and a reward of the work,

But I think it's the challenges that's rewarding, you know, dealing with a difficult kid that is constantly like just defiant and angry and then suddenly they come around and they bring three of their buddies by to meet you because you're their favorite teacher. Awesome! Not that that's my goal but it's like wow – I've developed a relationship with the students and now they can actually learn in my class. (Kristine)

While the relationships often represented success, there are also times they were not successful,

Well, I think the biggest challenge for me was that one particular child that I just felt like we never made a relationship ... Well, you know you try getting to know them. You try making time available for them. I mean sort of all the things that sort of work, right ... as a class – community building and he had no interest in ... So, but again, there were other things and it, you know ... so that was hard because he also wasn't interested then in working for me because he had no investment in the classroom ... It was hard for him too. He wasn't happy here or just happy in general and that was one of my most challenging years because I couldn't leave him at school either. He was someone who'd keep me up at night thinking about how to make a stronger relationship, how to motivate him, how to, you know, tap into that intrinsic piece. I mean I just felt like I never did it, so ... So, and since that year he's come back and visited me and dragged his mother in the first day of school and it was like wait a minute ... So, you know my husband would always say you don't know what's going on in there. You really don't. All you can do is what you can do and sort of put it out there and he'll take a hold of what he will, you know. But, still, it just felt yucky. Of course [You keep putting it out there every day] even when inside it was like urrrrrr and I'm so frustrated ... But all you can do is continue to be consistent with your own behavior and ... keep, keep offering ... (Fiona)

Lori talked about a time that was personally challenging, the death of a close

relative, and how even in those times, the relationships and responsibilities to her students were paramount:

...but every day I went but I left at half-day for the last two weeks of her [Lori's aunt] life but they were there, you know, and I knew that the next day they were going to be there with their faces and their needs and everything, so that is the thing that moves me during my workday and during my every day because I'm like well you know these kids you cannot just throw yourself and okay and that's it and now move on because they're there waiting for you to move on and they went through the process with me and I went when the day she died I was absent. I was absent that day but I went the next day and they were there, you know. They knew that it had happened but they were there with their letters and their poems and you know that everything is alright cause these kids they're there and they move on so you have to move on, too. (Lori)

The specific work with children, the actual teaching and learning, including the current performance expectations that play out in teacher evaluation, was not identified as a notably stressful part of the work.

The building of relationships was described in a eustressful tone, as a challenge and a responsibility that is savored, not a burden. Although they were each confident in their ability to form those relationships, each also easily described either a challenging situation or an inherent challenge in forming the necessary relationships. There seemed to be an underlying personal expectation of forming strong foundations with students, as expressed by Fiona:

You know for me what I have found that works and again this is part of the philosophy that my team shares, it's relationship building. I have children every year that, for whatever reason, have shown me behaviors from previous years. Right now I have a couple and I've worked very hard with them for a few weeks to create a very strong relationship and they're fine.... If a child

thinks you care about them then you can redirect that child without any problem because they know that you're always coming from a place of care. So, that's my biggest trick, I guess, is trying as hard as I can to build strong genuine relationships with my students.

and by Scott:

...so I was in 6th grade for a long time and it was finally when Jerry was there and I kind of felt I was a factory; we used to be kind of teaming and then eventually I taught every single 6th grader social studies. I had taught like the skills, like half skills where I kind of did a variety of things and then it was half social studies. So you kind of got to know the kids because you'd had 'em for two classes. When I went to all social studies I didn't get to know the kid at all; it was in for 40 minutes and out. And I truly felt it was a factory here. Here ... here you go ... in ... switch on and then out. And no kind of that connection piece. It was really hard. You get connections with the kids that are bubbly, vocally; the kids that are shy you just don't and I said you know I think it's time for a change.

This personal expectation may have at times challenged each of them but also built a large part of their identity as a successful teacher. They expressed that being a teacher is a bigger role than just being an instructor. The caring relationships supersede the instructional role, making a fuller picture of a teacher in the ways in which they see themselves. Fiona said:

Well, I mean I think with something like that I generally tend to think in terms of children and individual children who had certain challenges, let's say. So I had a student a few years ago who, and of course he was very behind grade level. He had some emotional issues. He would run from the school, I guess, I didn't ever see that part of him which I was lucky for but I was sort of prepped that this is some of what you should expect and blah, blah, blah and so my job day one was to make this child believe that I care about him, we're gonna have this relationship and he finished with me shy of grade level but the growth that he made was amazing to me. But also his mother cried at both of

our parent-teacher conferences and this... but she cried because he never not wanted to come. He never said no I don't want to come to school. He began to say I like school. He would read at home and he was a different kid, she said. This was a second grader and I don't know like what accounted for that change in him. I'm not thinking that oh I worked some magic but part of it, I think, was that he felt safe in the classroom and he felt like I loved him. His peers loved. He was a great kid ... so hearing that from her as a mom – we had like this real...we were both crying. It was so ridiculous but that made me feel good. That made me feel like Wow! I have changed his outlook at school at least for while he was with me. So I was very proud.

Lori also experienced this:

Students come with all these little pieces so you have to be all that. You have to be, you know...and some days you are better than others but you can; I mean I think, again if every day you think that you will treat these kids how you would treat your own and you are a good person and treat your own your own kids good then you should be able to talk to them and help and, you know, and make the tough calls if you have to make a tough call and talk to the parents and all that, you know, but there's support in the school to help you with that too but I don't think you can separate them from being a teacher. I would hate to just being there and I'm just here to teach...I don't think none of them, not even in 5th grade, I think they do it because they want to be mean. I think if they're mean to you it's for a reason; they're showing their frustration and their feelings through it so if you are the person there and if you happen to have a relationship with them where you can get to them then that's wonderful.

Scott described his perceptions as:

Well, I think that's how I keep it in perspective. I talk if there is something that is not right with my principal who doesn't agree with me and I talk and I compromise and in the end I say well this is for the kids and if this is what has to be done it has to be done. And as long as I can keep the kids first in my mind as long as I know that no matter what's happening and what the rules are and that the kids are my priority, I don't foresee burning out because they are fresh every time so as long as I have that in my mind I don't see, I don't think, I don't think there is any amount of money that I would rather have and not be with the kids. I don't think there's any other job I could do that's more

peaceful but I'm not with the kids so burning out will be just sitting in my house doing nothing because there's nothing I'd rather do. (Scott)

A notable exception to this was in the discussion with Violet. She identifies her success in her work with students as being essential but framed it in terms of their learning, in how she was able to reach them as learners or how she was able to overcome their learning challenges. Violet said:

There are many instances, I guess, that pop into my mind where I feel like educationally I got through to these kids, you know, whether it be, or even behaviorally – behavior modification program or the light bulb goes off kind of thing ... and a couple of students when I thought well, I have pulled all the rabbits out of the hat here like, I'm done. I can't think of anything else and then, of course you don't give up – you keep thinking and those were some of those moments with kids where the, I guess the light bulb goes off.

Although she clearly demonstrated persistence and commitment to her students, it was more framed in their academic successes, not the role she played in their lives outside of delivery of instruction. She never referred to the specific and individual relationships she has with her students. Some possibilities for this might include the fact that she often plays more of a support role than that of the primary teacher for a student. She also did not identify her students as having notable social challenges, for example poverty or parents with low levels of education, which most of the other participants did.

The majority of meaning making discussed by five of the participants (excluding Violet) is strongly situated and defined by and in the relationships they have. The primary and most obvious relationships are with children but each also spoke about collegial relationships and/or relationships with administrators as being important resources in

dealing with the challenges of the work. All of them also identified themselves as resources for others, whether in the context of ongoing team relationships or on an as needed basis for a colleague who was having a hard time with something related to the work. Scott, in one particular instance, spoke about how he would be available to any colleague who was struggling with lesson planning, instruction or interactions with parents. Fiona talked at length about her work in developing the units of study in her district's writing curriculum and serving as a resource for teacher in the implementation. Debbie sees herself as depending on colleagues to help sort out dynamics that aren't necessarily obvious to her, to help her situate her ideals and values within the organization.

All of these examples are rooted in the stressors of public school teaching and in each instance, the participant relied on the relationships they have built, or offered themselves as a resource to others, to manage the stressor and to grow professionally, a eustressful response that contributes to their work engagement.

Professional Growth and Change

The second theme that arose in each of these interviews is the commitment and emphasis these particular teachers place on their own growth as professionals in order to keep their work fresh. Again this theme came up repeatedly in spite of no direct questions being asked about this topic. All emphasized that they need to keep themselves intellectually engaged and growing in order to continue to develop positive meaning in

their work engagement. For them, professional growth is derived through professional reading, attending conferences, pursuit of National Board Certification, acquiring further degrees, school improvement work, mentoring or assisting colleagues and other similar activities. Below is a sample of the types of things that were said in the interviews:

I think everyone does need it. I don't care how good you are. I think we all do it [professional development]. I think we all need to do it if nothing else to kind of recharge us or get us fired up about something because I think that we all can become complacent in our, you know, in where we're at. We all need to be pushed outside of the box a little bit otherwise we tend to do the same thing in the same way, the same thing over and over again. And change is hard but change can be good. (Violet)

I was at that school for 12 years ... and I ended up getting three certifications in Science, and Biology broad field, and Chemistry which I got at different times and I added them all on over the years. Did National Board Certification at some point; I think it was probably about 8 or 9 years teaching and I realized I was getting a little stagnant doing the same things all the time. So I said well, you know, how can I refresh my practice? So I did that and the second time around I actually certified... Doing National Boards was a big thing. That was really gratifying to finally pass and it's been really useful too, like so many things we do with our professional development and so you do and it works. You know looking for evidence when we had to provide evidence of this, and you know knowing exactly how the evidence meets the standard of what you're supposed to teach or like you need to demonstrate that your kids are engaged.... (Kristine)

When I did my Master's in Reading I knew I didn't want to be a Reading Specialist. I just wanted all my kids to have a Reading Specialist for them.... (Lori)

In a related manner, most specifically discussed change as an important means of staying engaged in their work, in the context of changing professional practice through

their own learning but also in a larger framework such as changing grade levels, schools, or roles within the schools. Debbie, in fact, when first introducing and describing herself as a person, immediately identified that she likes change, saying,

... as a person, I feel I'm a very, very much a social person and I have a love for learning so I consider myself a life-long learner and I like change ... It keeps me motivated and it I I think I feel like I'm a very progressive person. Progressive meaning...I would say both [open minded and moving forward]. I would say more if I leaned toward one it would be moving forward. The open-mindedness, I think, is coming more with age. So, you know, in teaching I've found that there's never a dull moment and it's always about learning...not only for the kids but for myself personally it's always about learning, whether it's reading – The Reading Teacher or, um, reading one of the curriculum guides or reading a book that's going to help me know more me...you know I think that it's so much about relationships...and communication and connection that I'm in the right place, you know, to continue to foster that, I guess that belief in change.... (Debbie)

Change was described in terms of the excitement of new possibilities and challenges, not necessarily as evoking anxiety. A number of the participants described times they specifically sought a somewhat dramatic change for themselves, to bring themselves out of their professional comfort zone or away from becoming complacent. The ideas of professional growth and change were often intertwined:

I'm a very big believer that teachers should be changing, you know, and I always said if I could start picking from a file, it's time for me to change. (Scott)

He further elaborated later, saying:

I mean I embrace it [change]. I mean every day is a different day and if this year was the same as, you know, nineteen years ago, it would be boring and that that's the most exciting part about teaching and I think there are going to

be new challenges with kids and things that we're not even going to be able to understand; I mean I think that that's the exciting piece of trying to figure out...I don't really find that as like intimidating. Oh I totally think I can handle it. (Scott)

Fiona sought out change:

So, let's see, so for six years when I first started Sandra hired me as a kindergarten teacher and the other kindergarten teacher at the time is my best friend now and we taught kindergarten for 6 years and then right about the same time, it was almost like a 7 year itch, we both said you know, we might want to try another grade. (Fiona)

She explained how she sees growth as an essential part of staying fresh as a teacher:

I feel like my views as a teacher as a professional are continuing to be shaped. I'm not still sure yet, I guess, of what that means or maybe I've just never really thought about it. Yeah, I feel like I'm still trying to figure it out and for me I think I'm still trying to make it all work. I don't feel like I've gotten to that place as a seasoned professional where I've got everything just the way that, you know, I want it so that my instruction will look the same way year after year. I know. I know... but I don't want to be in that place necessarily either where my instruction looks the same every year. (Fiona)

In times of imposed or systematic change, most described an orientation towards the benefits to be derived organizationally and how they are often able to help colleagues through the change process. Most of the participants described orienting themselves within organizational big pictures, being able to see change situations as larger than themselves and their classrooms.

...last year at the end of the year when Mr. Harris wasn't here one day I said to the staff...they're like okay he's leaving, you know, why do you think he's leaving? We have such a good staff here and blah, blah, blah...and somebody said, you know, we've always done it this way and I said you know what? I

said I know that some of you are not going to like this, I said, but this building needs change.

And a couple of them jumped on me and one teacher said if, and I said, we can't do what we were doing twenty years ago, and a teacher said, if it's working why wouldn't I stay with it? And I was like, how do you know something doesn't work better? (Debbie)

A notable exception to this was in Violet's interview. Violet did not consistently have a growth orientation towards organizational change, saying, for example,

I guess anything that pushes you maybe a little bit outside your box, something you're not used to, whether it be change, whether it be things that are coming down administratively or things that we need to do to change. Those are challenges because I think we all kind of like things status quo. We all like to know what's coming at us and when that's ruffled a little bit it throws us.

When discussing systems change she often focused on how systematic changes affected her, not framing changes in an understanding of the existence of a bigger picture. For example, she described a need for teachers to understand that school administrators are often responding to larger mandates, an idea which many of the participants identified. The difference here was that she described change as a negative stressor for administrators, which filters down to her as a teacher. She said:

I feel bad for them [administrators] as well. They're under the gun. They're being evaluated. They've got to get all these teacher evaluations done and it's crunch time for them but within that environment, I think you have to be careful that the two don't collide. (Violet)

Other participants, on the other hand, described administrative directives and changes as being part of a larger paradigm that might need to be looked at from a variety of angles to gain understanding. For example, Scott and Kristine's similar orientations towards administration are exemplified in these words:

So I've always had good relationships with Administration. I think I'm pretty good and this I have to explain to some of the younger teachers a lot, is that understanding that Administration sometimes has to make decisions that we may not like because they have other knowledge that we can't have, that they can't share with us and you have to respect that, like you know, no they're not making decisions just to screw you over or just to be a jerk to you or just, you know, I mean there's some underlying reason. Have you thought about this angle? Maybe that's why they made that decision. (Kristine)

...the thing is that a lot of teachers are blaming administrators and the thing is that I tell like a lot of teachers ... I'm like, you know, before you get on your principals, I mean you really need to understand what they're doing and I never did one day until one day I really actually sat down with a principal. You know, I'm like, do you realize when they come in they have probably one hundred e-mails, I go, and then the phone is probably with a gazillion messages. So, they're getting it from the community, I said, so then there's 40 different personalities in this building that are coming to them. So they're trying to juggle that and then you've got students. So I said, you know, I go you don't really understand what they go through, you know, and they're trying to balance, you know, what they're trying to do. I said principals, you know, they're really there for teachers. I mean good principals are. You know, they're there for their building and to help, they're there.... (Scott)

The emphasis placed on professional growth and embracing change is rooted in goal setting and achievement and self-efficacy, aspects of the PsyCap constructs. The desire to grow professionally and organizationally is a large part of the positive meaning making for these teachers, translating into components of their work engagement.

Challenges

Each of the participants was asked to identify the biggest challenges in their work. The four biggest challenges identified relate to testing, political issues at the state level, time management and the new system for evaluating teachers.

Testing.

The amount of testing students required was commented on by Lori and Fiona:

I think most of the times it's been the stress of, you know, scores and all this craziness with testing and everything that it brings to it ... I think that with the stress of testing we kind of like forget a little bit about those philosophies that you write when you are in your Bachelors and your Masters was your philosophy and I always said that my philosophy was that regardless of how the kids did at the end – if they were better people just because they were with me I thought that was my goal. I think [testing overload] impacts way too much the class sizes and the testing but I honestly think that our biggest challenge is testing; it's not even resources – we have so many resources. These kids have so much in their hands but we can't manage all these things with everything that we have to do. Well, I lose a lot of sleep sometimes thinking ... how am I going to move them? (Lori)

I just try to do my job every day the best I can and then you know with our ISELs and blah, blah, blah and our testing – check in because I have to see if I'm being effective in my instruction but I know that that's got folks shaken up. The testing is a lot; I mean we go from, and I'm sure you know this of course, but we go from ISELs to DRA to then MAP and I felt like for two, almost three weeks, am I teaching? And that's a struggle, you know it feels like so much time that's not involved in rich experiences and I know that the testing is important and I know that we have to gather the data but it feels frustrating for the time that's given to us. (Fiona)

Testing is a large part of education today; these teachers are challenged by how to incorporate the requirements of the testing culture into the meaning they derive from their work, trying to align the demands with their orientation towards their priorities.

Political issues at the state level.

Scott and Violet were very keyed in to the political situation in their state, commenting:

...most definitely I think the politics is wearing me down tremendously. I just think that's the hardest piece. I totally understand holding teachers responsible. I totally understand performance and showing some group that your kids are growing. I just feel that we're going in the wrong direction educationally. (Scott)

He later came back to this topic saying:

You know, they're there for their building and to help, they're there so it's not them it's the politicians and the pensions a perfect, you know, you know when you're talking about all these, you know, like No Child Left Behind. I sat through. I've been on a committee where I've talked to a legislator. Like did you ever talk to teachers that are literally in the trenches that are there and have you actually sat down with them and talked to them about the class make up. I'm like I mean you guys like as legislators when you go visit a classroom and you do this publicity and you're there for an hour. (Scott)

Violet thought about similar topics, saying:

I think right now what it is is that there are a lot of unknowns out there. You know, I think not only with Common Core and we've adopted the Danielson...So, so two things, right there, you know, started off ... started the new year off like wow...And you know teachers worry about their pension. I

mean that's a huge thing too. And so you couple all those things together and it creates a lot of anxiety. A lot of anxiety and maybe feelings of inadequacy, like how on earth in this time do we get all these things done. (Violet)

Forces outside the school, at the political level, challenge the ways in which these teachers experience their own self-efficacy, not necessarily in the classroom but on a larger scale. The impact on work engagement is more long-term than day-to-day but the issues are definitely on the minds of these teachers as impacting their work.

Time management.

Managing their time with the many demands placed on them was commented upon by both Fiona and Kristine. Kristine's comment summarizes the thoughts of both:

I would say meeting all the requirements that Administration wants you to do. Yeah, I mean no matter what the reason is its just time. So I guess that would be...the time...is that there's just not time enough in the day to get it all done; to grade the papers, create interesting and exciting lessons that are engaging to the students and relevant and, you know, meet the standards and all those things and then doing all the little things that the Administration wants you to do – well make sure you have your learning intention up and make sure you have this or make sure this is posted, make sure you have a word wall...Sure – oh, don't forget to sign off that form that needs to be in by noon and you'd better get that down in the office; you know, checking your e-mails now. I mean when I started we didn't use e-mail and now it's like if I don't check my e-mail every half hour I'll have 80 e-mails...so I think organization and time...you know and just keeping up with things and I consider myself very, very good at developing lessons that are engaging the students and really get the content across but I don't always have time to make them as good as I would like. And you know the nice thing about teaching is that year after year you can improve those things and so I do and I mean I think my lessons have

gotten much better but I like to do new things too, you know, and try new things and sometimes you just can't work it in.

Time management as expressed by Fiona and Kristine is related to goal setting, balancing what teachers want to get done in planning outstanding lessons consistently and what must get done in administrative and other demands. Neither of these teachers framed these demands in a positive way, although there was acknowledgment that most of the tasks have merit.

New system for teacher evaluation.

The changes in the teacher evaluation system currently being implemented were discussed by five of the six participants, including the effects on teacher morale. The most prominent stressor mentioned by this group of teachers at this point in time is the changes in the way that teachers are being evaluated. None expressed that the new systems are unfair in any way or that the change is unnecessary. All were more concerned with the way teachers in general are reacting and the stress that it causes in schools, as well as the understandings of those who are implementing the changes. These comments by Violet, Debbie and Fiona are typical of the comments made with regards to this topic:

I'm second-guessing. I guess this year more than anything I second guess everything I do because of the changes but everything I do for my lesson plans to my e-mails I send home to parents, to anything, I mean I'm sitting and I'm spending a lot of time really thinking through it and second guessing myself on a lot of things. And with that that's in and of itself stressful...You're like yeah I've done this for 20 years and now all of a sudden I feel like I'm inadequate. I was definitely feeling and some anxiety with. I don't really

know how some of this Danielson stuff fits in with Special teachers because when you look at the things that are being assessed, some of it is not applicable. (Violet)

This feeling of not knowing, not knowing how you're really going to be evaluated. Not knowing or knowing that principals might not always have knowledge, the knowledge base of the curriculum and so when they come into a classroom they're, you know, I question sometimes and I shouldn't say I question it but I know that they may be looking not only at what I'm doing for me but at what I'm doing for themselves. (Debbie)

She later added:

...how people are talking about test scores – I'm finding that challenging and I find that challenging because I think that there's not enough objectivity for that and I know that, you know, when I look at a teacher I think there are other things that you have to look at, you know, and I had this talk with Mr. Harris last year. I was like okay, I wouldn't have made it. It was my off year and I said 'I wouldn't have really got distinguished based on this test score – based on these test scores'. And he said 'no you wouldn't' and I said 'okay, I had 5 Special Ed kids in my room' and he's like but there should be growth and I said I understand that. I said 'you gave me 4 behavior kids; I had a hell of a year last year.' It was very challenging and I said so you have one teacher that you're just gonna overload and then the other teacher is sitting pretty with a class, and he goes "yeah it sucked to be you".... (Debbie)

Fiona's comments were similar:

I think the teacher assessment piece is gonna be a big part of my later teaching years. I'm all for assessing my performance because I do think we need teachers and we need to hold teachers accountable is what I mean; not that we need teachers of course but we need ...we need systems in place so that we are accountable. Every job has ways to judge effectiveness and sort of quality control, right? We have to have that but there has to ways to do it where a teacher still feels respected as a professional and we'll see how ours plays out but I know that this system has gotten people kind of worked up. There's a lot of anxiety. I think that in my nine years of being in this District, which I love,

morale is perhaps at the lowest that I've ever seen it. So I would say definitely that how we assess teachers can be a challenge. (Fiona)

Although teacher evaluation depends on student achievement, these teachers were more concerned with the morale issues around the changes than with imminent changes in their instructional practices; that is, the stressor did not seem to impact them in the classroom, with their students, which is where meaning-making and identity confirmation happens for them. Fiona expressed her thoughts:

I can't change what is going to be put in place. I'm just one teacher, you know. I feel like it'll be whatever system they adopt, they're going to adopt and that will be what it is. Also, I try, like we have our growth targets and you know I have 'em saved on my computer but I don't look at them because it's my job to teach to the best of my ability and I will assess the children and they'll grow – I mean right? ...if for some reason the data shows that I didn't for whoever and for whatever reason that needs to be looked at. I need to address what I need to do in addition for that child or what's not working. So I try not to think about my rating and I don't ever think about that. I try not to think about the assessment system. I just try to do my job every day the best I can...

Teacher evaluation and the changes in policy at this time were identified as the biggest stressors for all of these teachers but none indicated that it impacted their day-to-day work with students. The meaning they derive from their work is not dependent upon the evaluation and the politics around the changes. Their work engagement is not dependent upon the outcomes of the evaluation; they often spoke about the important elements of their work not reflected in the new evaluation system that puts a heavy emphasis on the quantitative test scores, which does not necessarily align with their own meaning derived from the work.

The sixth participant, Kristine, referred to the changes in discussion but not necessarily positioning it as a stressor; this may be due to the possibility that the process in the state she works, which is different or may be at a different place in the change process than that of the other five, who all work in the same state as each other.

These coding of the data led to these three main themes. The first two are central to the meaning-making that happens in the course of their work for most of these teachers. The building of relationships and a focus on their own professional growth help them to build the resources needed to tackle the more negatively oriented challenges of the work. The orientation towards those challenges, while not necessarily positive, was often one of acknowledging the challenge as present (e.g. teacher evaluation) but not impacting their ability to stay focused on the part of their job that gives them a sense of self as a teacher. Other stressors were to be dealt with more specifically (e.g. time management) but the teachers are still able to keep their focus and have a sense of efficacy that they will still be able to be successful.

Chapter 6: Findings – Psychological Capital

The interviews were coded for the components of psychological capital: hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. The participants had been selected for their generally positive outlook so it was not surprising that all of the constructs of psychological capital were found in each of the interviews, although not in as obvious a way as the previous themes of relationships, professional growth and challenges were. The integrated concept of psychological capital asserts that the four constructs working together have a greater impact than they would working in isolation of one another and so the interviews were also evaluated looking for evidence of work engagement as an indicator of eustress. Although the data was not viewed in a quantitative manner, hope and self-efficacy were noticeably seen the most often in these interviews. Hope and self-efficacy are intricately tied to each other and overlapping in their definitions so this correlation is not unexpected.

Hope

Evidence of hope, defined by Snyder as “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (1) agency (goal directed energy) and (2) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (Snyder, et al., 1991, p. 287) was seen throughout each of the interviews. Hope is recognized as a cognitive state characterized by a proactive determination of the way to meet one’s goals, using strengths to reach the intended goals and having a back-up plan or alternate strategies if the first plan is not

successful. There is an element of perseverance in hope, backed up by a determination and belief that the goals are achievable.

In the interviews with these teachers hope was found in their expectations, beliefs and goals for themselves as people, as learners, and as teachers but also in their expectations and goals for students and colleagues. There are numerous possible quotes from each of the participants that exemplify a hopeful orientation; the following are selected as representative of some of the ways hope is found in the individuals interviewed.

Kristine and Violet both gave examples in discussing their own teaching, in the context of a lesson not going well, especially when being observed by an evaluator:

I mean you have to internalize it somewhat cause you've gotta be reflective and change if you need to. And it's like well what am I doing that's wrong if everyone is failing. I mean clearly there's some, you're doing something wrong as a teacher but there's a balance there and I guess that's the way I'd put it is that burnout is caused by not being able to balance those expectations and frustrations....(Kristine)

Well, first I walked in and sat down and he laughed ... That was horrible and he goes it happens. It happens. So now what are you going to do here? You know, what are you going to do now? That flopped. What are you going to do? And I said well I need to back up and I need to go back to whatever it was and I need to re-teach....(Violet)

And in the context of a stressful work environment where there are deep philosophical differences about the work:

And I said, you know she was like okay, you have to find your way – navigate to see what people you can connect to and I made some connections in the

building; the Speech teacher at that time – she was African American and I asked her to come into my class to teach speech ... so that she could see how I'm working with the kids and give me some feedback. Tammy Walters, the social worker here, she was there. I went to her and I talked to her very frankly about how I felt about kids being treated and I said is there a cultural piece I'm not understanding here. And she's like absolutely not. She's says kids are kids ... and so I found that she was on the same page as me and then there was, you know, you always connect with a couple of teachers just through talking to them and I became very connected, Debbie Mountain, the music teacher here now, and so they eased the pain for me because they helped me to feel that I was in the right place, that the need for change wasn't within me but it was within the building. (Debbie)

In terms of professional growth and ensuring their own options for the future:

For those particular times when I felt like leaving teaching it was probably that I felt that I could be stuck in a place where I don't want to be but I feel now that outside of those road blocks so to speak, I've given myself avenues and I've taken opportunities to pursue those in education; you know like going into Coaching, going back into Special Ed. And knowing that that's there and I could possibly still use it down the road, yeah. So I don't feel stuck. (Debbie)

I kind of wait for opportunities to knock and I believe in paying attention and then opportunities present themselves and if I'm ready for those opportunities then I jump on it and so I believe in being prepared for opportunities.... (Kristine)

In working with children who face challenges:

I think the biggest lesson I take from that is even when children exhibit behaviors that we don't like in the classroom, you know, parents are doing the best they can. So when I interact with parents what I pull from that experience is I think I always try to approach it with we're both parents, we're both doing the best we can for our children; let's talk about now how we can put our heads together and figure out a plan that works. So I think that that was the most sort of important life-lesson I pulled from that. (Fiona)

In their understanding of their capacity to take on challenges:

Well challenge is something that doesn't let me be successful really quick so any of those things that I keep trying one thing and if it doesn't let me be successful then I have to figure out how to try another thing. Those are my challenges... You know what, that experience what it taught me is that you need to know what you're weaknesses are and you need to do something about them yourself because it is hard if I go and saying a lot I'm noticing that, you know, if you don't realize your weaknesses you're not going to really grow; it's easier if you know what your weaknesses are.... (Lori)

I think my parents know and even my bosses recognized very early on that they don't need to say anything because I'm harder on myself than anybody could ever be. I mean I will, and I'll be the first to admit, and I will – hey, you know this is what I did. I need to fix this so I really look at when something does not go well what do I need to do to fix it to make that better right away, and not, you know, I mean like right away. I mean if I tried it a couple of times I'll ask for advice, for sure. I'm the type of person I usually don't give up until I find some type of way to make it work...you know I can't really think of too many things right now that I can think of that I just haven't really because I always try to find the different pieces to make it successful whether it's collaborating with people; I'm certainly not an expert so if I don't know something I'm the first to go to somebody and ask them, you know, what can I do to make this better? So that's how I kind of look at things. (Scott)

It's always interesting. It's kind of like my motto, you know, it's always interesting. I think like right now with it being spring semester and there's all the talk about programming for next year and changes for next year and I mean every spring is like that and just having been doing it for so many years and the young teachers are freaking out. So and so is gonna do this ... oh my God what's happening with this and I mean they're really spazzing about it and it's like relax – this is the spring semester. There's always speculation about what will happen next year. At least you can rest assured it's always going to be interesting. You know, I mean to me every day is different. There's always different challenges. I like the unexpected to happen cause it's like what do I do now; it just makes it exciting. (Kristine)

Positively oriented teachers may not have all the answers but they are hopeful that they can make a difference, can find a solution. They believe that obstacles can be overcome with a plan.

Inherent in work engagement is a hopeful orientation towards challenges, both expected and unexpected. These teachers seem to savor the challenges that come their way, believing that they can work out a way to be successful.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy “refers to an individual’s conviction (or confidence) about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context” (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998b, p. 66). Important to note is that the skills may or may not actually be there but the belief that one can take on a situation is there. Self-efficacy is concerned with an individual’s beliefs about being able to organize skills and abilities in challenging situations (Maddux, 2005). In the understandings of Psychological Capital, self-efficacy is often used interchangeably with self-confidence (Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007), although this is often not the case in other theoretical contexts of understanding self-efficacy. Each of the participants in this study exhibited a strong sense of self-efficacy in many situations in their professional lives. Again, it is easy to find evidence in each of the interviews of well-developed professional self-efficacy; the challenge is in limiting the quotes to the scope of this paper.

Kristine told several specific stories of her work in a school in an impoverished

neighborhood in which the students were very difficult to deal with and teach. She began working at that high school with no formal training as a teacher; her only experience in teaching as a teacher's assistant in Biology at the college level as she earned her first Master's degree, in Molecular Genetics. In spite of her lack of technical knowledge (skill) about teaching and learning, she thrived in this environment because she believed she could do the work needed even as she developed the necessary skills.

Her sense of being able to handle what came her way was evident as she talked about her early days at the school and why she stayed there for twelve years:

So I started on Monday...so I had an interview on Thursday and I started on Monday. So I like to tell people I fell into the job of teaching...it wasn't really a choice but I knew what I was getting into. People that I worked with were shocked cause they were like oh my god aren't you going home every night and crying cause these kids are yelling at you and they're being disruptive and I'm like oh yeah they're being disruptive and yeah sometimes they're mean but you know what, they're kind of funny and I, you know, yeah I totally don't know what I'm doing but I'm gonna stick it out through the end of the school year and then I'll make a decision cause I really did kind of enjoy it. I knew I sucked. I mean I had no idea what I was doing. I'm like okay, next chapter. Let's read ... I don't know but then to continue in the position I had to get my certification. So I enrolled at [school] in their 1-year Certification Program and started that in May. So, I was still teaching like my first year and I was in that and that was really enlightening. Oh my god...these are the strategies that I'm supposed to be doing...okay. And that really that changed everything.

So my second year of teaching then was a whole different world. I mean I was, you know, I had strategies under my belt and I felt I knew what to do. I knew how to, you know, just develop... And every year I would get asked by my Chairperson in Administration are you going to stay with us? Are you going to stay with us? You know and everyone knew like I had a Master's in something else and kind of just fell into it and that it wasn't my intention to be a teacher. So I always got asked that for probably about three years. And I was like, yeah I'm still enjoying it so I'm gonna stick with it. So, yeah I know what it's like to really suck at teaching and not know what I'm doing and start

mid-year and, you know, and then I had to take all these courses at night ... to get my Certification.

And that was one of the reasons I had stayed there so long is that I felt like I was able to do that so I kind of had an obligation to stay because I was good at it – dealing with kids that are so troubled and you know, it's like yeah, the kids are there not because they want to learn, it's because they're safe, you know, they're not out on the street when they're in the school building...

In a reference to her day-to-day work, she talked about doing everything she can to reach students:

...am I really doing everything I need to do? Am I, you know, addressing different learning styles? Am I giving 'em multiple opportunities using this way, and this way to learn this material? Am I supporting them when they have questions? Am I explaining things in a way that they can understand?

Many of the participants, particularly those with more experience (Violet, Scott, Debbie, Kristine), talked about the maturing of their confidence in their abilities to deal with whatever comes their way in their careers. Kristine put it this way:

Um, I feel pretty good about myself ... I feel pretty good about myself as a teacher. I know I do the best I can and I don't personalize or internalize things that are troubling so much compared to newer teachers or even when I was first starting out and like if they're not, you know, just beating myself up because oh my God my kids aren't doing well – what do I do about that?

Violet's response in this quote was directly framed in the area of dealing with stressful situations or changes:

Well I think when you come out of college you have save the world kind of mentality where you feel like you're able to tackle anything and move on –

you're gonna solve all these kids' problems, and you know, over the years you realize that as good as you are sometimes you just can't fix it. I think that is a learning experience definitely. I think I've gotten to be a better teacher as I've gotten older and I don't know why that it is. I guess maybe I just feel more confident in what I do...if you're gonna sit and stress out about every little thing that doesn't go your way I think it can fester and that you've gotta just approach each day – it's new day and when things are thrown at you, you learn how to deal with it because sitting around and crying about it and having a pity party isn't gonna help.

In identifying challenges in her own life, Debbie actually identified low self-confidence as a challenge early on in her life. She spoke about not feeling “good enough” with regards to her peers when she was a student and about a physical condition that made her very self-conscious. However, in conversation with her, there was a striking difference as it was clear that she considers herself to be very competent in the classroom, in her relationships with students and many colleagues, and as a thoughtful change agent in her school. This is a part of her understanding of her maturing as a teacher, where she uses her reflectiveness to evaluate the ways in which she has derived meaning in her work.

When I feel that I've put the energy, effort and work into doing something that's going to move my kids and this is within my profession and I see that something, I see that growth. That's success. That I can move them...Challenge for me is more about people blocks and road blocks. Um, the people blocks – I feel that I've gotten much better with and that speaks to my own confidence. Road blocks continue to be challenges for me.

But don't you think that you [teachers] bring those pressures upon yourself? I mean yes there's this pressure up here but I will fight the person who comes in this classroom and says now, she – give her a poor evaluation, you know, because of her test scores and whether it is a poor evaluation or not, I still feel good about what I do. I mean why would you cave to pressure? I don't know, I have this internal motivation that is going to keep me going and keep me being successful, you know. I'm not going to cave to the pressures; I never have and I don't think I ever will.

Lori talked about successes in implementation of significant events in her school, where school culture is changed, and her belief that she could accomplish those things because they needed to be done:

So, it usually stems from a little idea...somebody...I have a good partner now and she just goes along with any crazy idea that I have but I wanted to have a Children's Day Celebration because we always complain about our families and that they're not involved...So we're like well let's do a Children's Day and it was so huge, you know, it was such a success; the teachers, you know, some teachers just got in there with me and the parents loved it and it was such an accomplishment, I thought, that, you know, that...to see the whole school—to see all 500 people going through those hallways and eating and doing all these things just because I had this idea....

There's another thing that I'm really proud of is that I, again because of the struggle of parent involvement, you know, we're always saying well why parents are not involved and I always say well they don't understand what we're talking about so maybe our point is to help them understand, educate them – because we know all these things but we know because we've gone to school for some many years but they don't. They don't have to know how to do reading with their kids...I talk to my partner and I say well I have this idea of having a meeting every month where we bring the parents and we teach them about something. So the first time we did it was last year. We started with our first one, how to read MAP? What is MAP and what is a percentile, when you see a percentile, what is it that they're telling you about your kid? And what should you do? What are your rights? What can you go and ask the teacher? And we did it. We did one for MAP, one for AIMSweb. We did one for ISAT³. We did what math games you can do at home, what literacy games...what websites are good and we gave them all these things to the parents...They're learning and they're asking questions and Mrs. Sanchez how is it that you're teaching them how to do the time, how to add time and I am there teaching the parents a lesson, and I'm teaching their kids and I think that that is going to help those parents. I tell them this is the reality we're doing and I talk to them from my Hispanic sense and experience and I'm like

³ AIMSweb is an assessment and progress monitoring tool used by many schools several times per year; Illinois Standards Achievement Test is the state accountability test given once per year to students in grades 3-8.

we cannot use I don't know English as an excuse here. Nobody cares if we know Spanish so we cannot give these excuses to the kids and, you know, and I talk to them though because they can relate to me that I have that leeway with them.

Lori also spoke about the way in which she is confident she can deal with all of the demands placed on her, the myriad of needs the students come to school with, again because these needs need to be attended to:

Just like deal with social problems and...you can't separate those. I think that if you have students come with all these little pieces so you have to be all that. You have to be, you know...I think so because that's what moms do...and they do it and some days you are better than others but you can; I mean I think, again if every day you think that you will treat these kids how you would treat your own and you are a good person and treat your own your own kids good then you should be able to talk to them and help them.

... I always say that I want to feel like, my goal is that at least one year that every single one of my kids are like shining stars; they're meeting scores. I just want to be the best teacher these kids have had. When I did my Master's in Reading I knew I didn't want to be a Reading Specialist. I just wanted all my kids to have a Reading Specialist for them. My goal has been my goal since I started and in 10 years I will still be working and will still be working 20 and 30 years from now hopefully and it will just be get that year that I had that group that I had that year – the best education they could possibly get from me.

Scott gave a specific example from when he was a very young teacher of being hired by a principal over internal candidates and the reception from his new colleagues:

I went with him to his other building and that was hard. That was probably a challenging spot because there were teacher aides that were applying for that position. And they thought they were gonna, yeah—and that whole building expected them and I came in as a male and one of the only males outside of Special Ed and PE teacher and I was known as Tony's boy and that was not

easy...I mean I just remember walking past some rooms and, you know they're talking about you. It was hard. It was one of those things where it was I think I subconsciously resorted back to how I what happened in middle school and it was like I'm gonna show you that I'm not...I was not brought on as just a token...and I'm gonna show you that I am here to make a difference, that he made the right decision and I'm going to prove to him that you made the right decision.

He also talked about a time when he and his life partner thought of moving to another state and the prospects of a job search:

You know and you've gotta believe in yourself. Yeah, you know I mean when I was in the District, you know, and I'm like okay I'm gonna have to look for a job again, I'm like it's not gonna be easy, I know, and it's gonna be expensive and I've gotta sell myself. I've gotta put a portfolio together. What am I gonna do to make myself stand out. I've gotta put a portfolio. I've gotta think. I mean you've got to think outside of the box. I mean you've gotta do things that, you know, it's not gonna be luck. It's a matter of getting yourself out there and, you know, finding something that is gonna make you different and stand out...you know, and that's what I kind, you know when people were looking for a job I'm like you you know, a principal gets 600 letters...You know you're gonna have to do something that is gonna literally make that principal say wow! I want to know more about this person... you know, just to get you the interview, you know. You know cause then you're on your own, you know, and I think that's the piece, and that's not luck.

Each of these teachers talked about their personal and professional values as grounded in hard work. Each of them self-identified as a hard worker and many of them as someone who has overcome some hardship as well. Inherent in being a hard worker and persistence are the ideas of self-efficacy, resilience and hope. Someone who is a hard worker likely needs to have some components of self-efficacy and resilience; it is unlikely that one would continue to work hard and persist without a belief in their own

capabilities. Hope requires hard work in developing a plan and finding another way if needed. All of these elements are incorporated and evident in the way these individuals approach their work and importance they ascribe to it, translated into work engagement.

Resiliency

Masten and Reed (2002) define resiliency as “a class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk” (p. 75). Resiliency involves assessing the level of threat in a situation and assessing if one has the resources to elicit an acceptable response. Masten’s (2001) work looks at resilience in light of everyday skills and psychological strengths, concluding that resilience does not come from “rare and special qualities” but rather is comprised of “ordinary, normative human resources” with “profound implications for promoting competence and human capital in individuals” (p. 235). In other words, resiliency is not something that is developed out of adversity but resides within the individual to be utilized in times of adversity.

The participants in this study exhibited resiliency, both personally and professionally. Several of them described personal situations that required psychological strength to persevere through. For example, Scott spoke of significant challenges as a young person who was bullied and sexually abused. Kristine lived with a mother who was schizophrenic. Lori relocated to this country believing her skills in English were more developed than they apparently were, causing unexpected career setbacks. Debbie struggled with a physical condition that made her self-conscious in interpersonal

interactions. Fiona and Violet did not share significant personal challenges with the researcher, but it is possible that they, too, had these kinds of events in their pasts and chose not to share them with the researcher. All of these individuals were able to incorporate these situations into the meaning of their lives in ways in which they did not become victimized. This orientation is also evident in their perspective on their work.

In her work in the school with the students with behavioral challenges, Kristine told a story of a very serious incident in which a student assaulted her in front of a class:

I did get pushed one year onto a table in front of a class of students and the kid felt me up and I mean that was bad... The principal wouldn't let me go back for a week cause they actually brought in the Sensitive Crimes Unit cause I was felt up and they interviewed every kid and I did show up two days later cause I was like no I've gotta do my job, you know, whatever, and I pressed charges against the kid but I walked in in the morning and they were having a Staff Meeting about me... and I was like I walked right by ...I was like oh god... I've gotta go. Like I don't want to hear it, you know, it would just upset me. Don't be talking about me... so I would say that that was a very difficult situation and a lot of that difficulty was dealing with it afterwards with people like why are you staying at that school? You know, and I was like well this is one kid, you know, I mean I had been there 10 years at that point and I'm like, you know, one kid in ten years and something like this happens and it got wrote up in the paper and, you know, so I was answering questions from other people and the public, you know, the so-called public, you know, and to my family. And so that was difficult but how did it shape me as a teacher, I think it's just realizing that one so-called bad kid doesn't mean they're all like that... and you have to realize that.

The participants spoke about values, strengths, and characteristics that contribute to their resiliency. These included hard work (mentioned by all), humor, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, and furthering oneself as a person. Additionally, all of the participants emphasized the importance of being happy. For example:

I mean usually I'm kind of like if I make that decision I kind of go with it and then yeah, sometimes I will kind of rationalize or kind of talk it out and...but it's usually it's like whatever makes you happy and then you know, life is short. You know, what's gonna make you happy and that's kind of the piece so....(Scott)

He later said:

To me, success if I were to look in somebody else is if they are like happy. You see them going around and that they've got this little smile, you know, and I mean you can see, and that's the thing where I'm starting, you know. You see very wealthy people that are not happy at all or they're, you know, like my older brother. I mean I know he makes a bunch of money and, you know, he's working probably 14-15 hours a day, you know. Is he successful? Yes. Is he maybe successful in life? He may see he is but I, you know, it's like, you know, you're constantly dragging yourself, you know, and I think that if you're truly happy and you absolutely love what you're doing – to me that's successful. (Scott)

Fiona talked about success and happiness from another perspective:

You know it's funny because my son and I have been talking a lot about success for him when he becomes an adult because he's not really engaged at the high school in terms of their academic program. And so I'm trying to instill in him some intrinsic motivation because it's a means to an end in terms of I want him to have the skills so that he can be successful as an adult meaning he can go into whatever field he's passionate about and feel competent with it, feel like he's done a good job at the end of the day. Feels like he's made a difference in whatever profession he has, whether it's made a difference in someone's life or in someone else's work but contributed in some way. So, competency, contributing and having a passion for what he's doing. (Fiona)

Resilience is built into Kristine's thoughts on success:

I think success if when you are happy with what you've accomplished. When you feel, you know what, I am happy with this. I think it's a daily battle. You some days have more success than others but I think that's it. I think that

success in anything is when you can have a moment where you're like I like this; this is what I wanted.

I've always believed in working hard and being honest and having integrity but I think you can do that in a lot of different ways and to me my biggest goal in life and this is gonna sound like, you know, lame but it's just to be happy no matter what I'm doing so I've never really cared what my job is. I happened to fall into, very serendipitously, a job that I love and that really worked out well for me but I think that things happen for a reason ...
(Kristine)

Similarly, she later commented:

Um, well commitment and perseverance pays off. You know if I had given up...I'd never know if I could have done it and the same with the Master's, you know, if I just quit, you know, I think sticking it out and finishing something that you're committed to...I think those are the biggest things.
(Kristine)

Again, resilience is tied to self-efficacy in that the person has to have the belief that they can weather the challenges and move towards a successful outcome, perhaps general happiness.

The resilience needed to not only manage the challenges of being a teacher in the present day but to thrive under challenging circumstances is also evident in the life histories of these individuals, both before and while they became teachers. The data indicates a focus and a savoring of one's experiences in ways that contribute to the work engagement of these individuals.

Optimism

Optimism as defined by Seligman is "an explanatory style that attributes positive

events to personal, permanent, and pervasive causes and interprets negative events in terms of external, temporary and situation-specific” (F. Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007, p. 90). Optimists take credit for positive events that happen, believing that they have in some way controlled the causes of the positive event, expecting the causes to continue and to be applicable to future events. Optimists embrace change and see the potential for the future; they are calculated risk-takers. Optimists assume that difficulties or adversity can be handled successfully. Optimism is not a pie-in-the sky kind of outlook, that everything will be great all the time, but is realistic in its expectations. Again the qualities of optimism overlap extensively with the qualities of hope and self-efficacy and were seen in each of the participants. Kristine called herself a realistic optimist, saying:

I do look on the bright side but I tend to have realism, you know, I’m not overly sunny, you know, ohhh my gosh everything is so wonderful. Look on the bright side; hey – this is a positive for this but let’s keep this in mind or you know, let’s, you know, yeah – I don’t look at the world with rose colored glasses but I try to see the bright side of things and just, you know, things could always be worse...And so I, you know...and in that way I’m an optimist but I definitely try to keep things realistic and I’d rather set myself up for disappointment in some ways and then have it turn around and some good result happen...like as a surprise versus expecting something good and then being disappointed afterwards.

Violet shared a similar sentiment, but added her personal faith as a component of her outlook:

I think I got smarter [over the years]. I think when you come into the teaching profession you’re out of college, you know everything, you’re going to save the world and this is just how everything is going to go and you find out very quickly that that’s not the case. It’s not always going to go the way you think it’s going to go. You know, I do think I’ve learned a lot but I think my flexibility and my acceptance I think that that’s always been there.

Personally, I mean I am a Christian so I let things go, you know, things out of my control so I can't sit and worry about it. I try not to but I don't know, I guess I am a pretty roll with the flow kind of person.

I'm a glass half-full kind of person. I tend to look for the silver lining on things and know that oh definitely. I think that's what keeps me going.

Debbie was very purposeful in her identification of the way she orients her thinking, including the component of growth and identification of the acquisition of tools to maintain a healthy, optimistic outlook:

I mean you can't live in that for such a long time that it's gonna, you know, take hold of your life and that's ... again, that's the kind of person I really am but since then, you know, when I've gone through rough times, I have better tools, you know. I can move through those times in a much healthier way.

And maybe because I choose to see the glass half full and it is, you know. It's just the way...I mean it takes up too much energy to be negative, you know, yeah....

Many of the participants attributed their success or well-being to luck. This is a reflection of optimism that "good things happen to me". For example, Fiona:

I just sort of fell into it and then things happened that made it all easy, I guess, to finish the program, get a job at a school I loved and then work with wonderful teammates; it all just sort of lined up for me...and every day I think I'm so lucky and I mean I love my school. I work with my closest friends in the world and wow, not many people do that and it certainly would be even our own building and I'm sure that see teams that don't, for whatever reason, don't gel...I'm gonna keep saying how lucky I am and you're gonna think oh my gosh, she's crazy but again because I've only taught here I have nothing to compare it to. (Fiona)

Scott expressed an understanding that luck might be the impetus for good things

happening but then it is up to him to use his skills, reflecting self-efficacy and hope, to continue that trajectory:

Sometimes we are in the right place. I totally believe that, you know, when it came to the student teaching thing I subbed, you know, and I somehow I think that was just fate. I think I was lucky, you know. After that it was me – that door got opened. It was up to me, you know. I subbed. I knew that I had to prove myself as a sub.

So I've been very fortunate with the people that I've met who have believed in me and allowed me to do risky, crazy, you know, out of not sitting there in a book and reading a book and making it come alive and supporting that whole way every single time. I have never had an administrator that, except for that one superintendent, that was, excuse my language, an absolute asshole. I've never had somebody that was like that.

I think it's a combination [luck and control over your fate]. I think the fortune part comes in, your values going back you asking what your values are, what your work ethic is...I think it kind of comes to that. I think if you demonstrate the type of person and the way you are people see you in a different way. I mean I think that if you demonstrate the types of things and you're open and you're willing and I think that kind of brings you that, you know, it's not the luck, you know, you're bringing it upon yourself, your training – you bring that.

I've been so fortunate in my career I can't even begin to tell you.

Additionally, there were a number of instances where the participants talked about themselves in the larger scheme of the things, with an understanding that there are some things they cannot change and will accept and continue on in the important parts of their work. Lori and Fiona referred specifically to the pressures of accountability:

Well there's many little battles...at school, I mean it's so hard with the way the school is, the way, you know, government is, and everything so I just try to get, I mean, to forget about everything and just focus into one little and if I see that little kid was happy at the end of the day I'm like okay – you know here I have one. I have one here and I have one. When I learn to do that because I

am all over the place with it but that's it, just picking one little thing every day that I'm going to try to focus on it and at the end of the day I'm like...and if I didn't well that's okay so I get to try all over again tomorrow. (Lori)

I can't change what is going to be put in place. I'm just one teacher, you know. I feel like it'll be whatever system they adopt they're going to adopt and that will be what it is. Also, I try, like we have our growth targets and you know I have 'em saved on my computer but I don't look at them because it's my job to teach to the best of my ability and I will assess the children and they'll grow—I mean right? (Fiona)

In most of the participants there was a noted urgency, interpreted in this study as engagement, in discussing their work. However, there was also a notable acknowledgement of the limitations experienced working in public education as well. This seems to be consistent with a realistic optimism. Kristine talked about how she can and does show students multiple paths to success, but ultimately the students have to choose to take one of those paths, and her obligation ends if they choose not to. Scott talked about the frustrations and limitations of public policy; he feels he can be successful in his work in spite of those limitations but maybe not as successful as he might be without them. Fiona talked about being only one person and having to accept what comes with regards to the teacher evaluation system but not feeling its effects in her day-to-day work in helping children learn and grow, which is where she puts her efforts. While all of these participants were positive in their orientation and devoted to their students and doing a good job, it was not a blind positivity. Rather, their orientation and meaning making was based on their optimism and self-efficacy in dealing with the stressors but also in knowing where to draw the line for themselves and focus elsewhere.

Each of the components of Psychological Capital is found in each of the interviews, in each of the participants and their responses. The working together of the components to give support to the concept that Psychological Capital is greater than the parts can be found in the evidence of work engagement. Similarly, the components seem to work together as a sort of buffer against the stressors present.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The data supports several arguments, some of which serve to connect the inductive and deductive themes, others which draw on one or the other more heavily. The contrast provided by the interview with Violet is explored separately, with the first analyses focusing primarily on the data drawn from the interviews with Debbie, Kristine, Fiona, Scott and Lori.

Eustress and Work Engagement

The purpose of this study was to look at ways in which teachers incorporate the stressors inherent in teaching into the meaning-making in their work. The study attempts to look for positive meaning-making, a eustressful response to challenges, and thus an engaged work trajectory that is different from the oft-presumed trajectory of burn-out for teachers. The data supports the existence of meaning-making arising from positive, eustressful orientation towards the challenges faced in the day-to-day work of teaching in public schools.

While the stressors vary from individual to individual, this study's participants (except Violet):

- consistently exhibited a eustressful orientation within their work, drawing positive meaning from, even savoring, stressful experiences,

- positively situated the stressors within a larger context, often based in goal identification and achievement, and
- drew upon the components of PsyCap to not get bogged down, keeping the interpersonal relationships and their own growth as an important focus.

It is clear that they were highly engaged in their work, as described by Bakker and Demerouti (2008): “Engaged employees often experience positive emotions, including happiness, joy and enthusiasm; experience better health; create their own job and personal resources; and transfer their engagement to others” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 215). For example, the building of relationships was described eustressfully, requiring effort and thoughtfulness and not always successful, but something to be savored. The building of relationships upon which the instruction can be layered is central to the urgency of the work being engaged in.

These teachers incorporate their work into their sense of identity, an indicator of work engagement. They cannot imagine doing anything else; they draw a positive sense of self from their relationships with children and colleagues, and the goals they set for themselves and their students. They have “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli, et al., 2002, p. 74), illustrated by high levels of energy, resilience and persistence in the face of difficulty, pride, inspiration, significance, and challenge in their work (Bakker, et al., 2008).

PsyCap Components and Meaning Making

The literature tells us that the quantity and quality of resources, including personal resources, have been shown to have a positive relationship with work engagement. Personal resources and positive self-evaluation of resources contribute to resiliency, goal-setting, higher performance and satisfaction (Hobfoll, et al., 2003; Judge, et al., 2005). Hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism are the personal resources examined in this study. Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources theory states that an individual accrues resources to be used in times of crisis (Hobfoll, 1989). Crisis might be viewed as extreme events that might cause someone to leave the profession, such as the attack Kristin suffered, or the current persistent stress of the teacher evaluation system or chronic stress of time management or the state's political situation. These teachers seem to consistently draw on their personal resources in their work and create new resources for themselves through professional growth. Similarly, their investments in relationships and growth seem to generate more PsyCap resources, increasing hope, self-efficacy, resilience and optimism. For example, Debbie and Kristine have pursued multiple degrees, or National Board Certification, to make them stronger teachers. They have confidence that they can meet the challenges, and develop plans or goals to do so. Lori earned an additional degree so that she has expertise in reading so that all of her children would benefit, not just those targeted for additional reading support. Kristine talked about the impact she had on students such that they would bring their friends to meet her. They are able to situate those challenges, for example teacher evaluation, in a context that does not interfere with what they have determined to be the importance in their work because they have the

resources to further develop the meaning-making areas to buffer the impact of the stressors.

Their resources allow them to determine what is important and buffer, not to just react to, the stressors that are external to the important part of their work. This was very evident in the way that Fiona and Debbie, for example, talked about the new teacher evaluation. They could see the value in it but did not feel it changed their practice because doing what is best for students is their priority and the evaluation falls the way it will.

Each of these teachers talked about their personal and professional values as grounded in hard work. Each of them self-identified as a hard worker and many of them as someone who has overcome some hardship as well. Inherent in being a hard worker and persistence are the ideas of self-efficacy, resilience and hope. Someone who is a hard worker likely needs to have some components of self-efficacy and resilience; it is unlikely that one would continue to work hard and persist without a belief in their own capabilities. Hope requires hard work in developing a plan and finding another way if needed. All of these elements are incorporated and evident in the way these individuals approach their work and importance they ascribe to it.

Several of the participants spoke very directly to a correlation of their life experiences and their professional identity. This also ties in with the resources they see themselves as possessing, resources gained through personal experience. For example, Lori spoke of the way in which she views herself as a model to the families she serves as she is also an immigrant, but has worked hard and achieved her goals. Fiona has a strong

connection with the mothers of her students, relating to them in that capacity, bringing a compassionate understanding of what mothers want for their children. The adversity that Steve overcame as a student is directly incorporated into the relationships he has with students and the way he challenges them to expect more from themselves and to seek help from willing adults if they are emotionally struggling. These individuals incorporate some of the challenges faced in their own lives and the challenges of the people they serve into a component of their professional identity, seemingly as a positive response to these stressors. Again, inherent in these examples are the incorporation of personal values, self-efficacy and hopefulness in the individuals' meaning making and identity as a professional.

In most of the participants there was a noted urgency, interpreted as engagement, in discussing their work. Work engagement is the outcome, or evidence, of the linking of the inductive themes of relationships and professional growth to the deductive themes of resources and resource development. The majority of meaning-making discussed by five of the participants is strongly situated and defined in the relationships they have and their commitment to their professional growth. There is evidence that the basis for developing those areas comes from the resources the teacher possesses. The primary and most obvious relationships are with children but each also spoke about collegial relationships and/or relationships with administrators as being important resources in dealing with the challenges of the work. All of them also identified themselves as resources for others, whether in the context of ongoing team relationships or on an as needed basis for a colleague who was having a hard time with something related to the work. Scott, in one particular instance, spoke about how he would be available to any colleague who was

struggling with lesson planning, instruction or interactions with parents. Fiona talked at length about her work in developing the units of study in her district's writing curriculum and serving as a resource for teachers in their implementation. Debbie sees herself as depending on colleagues to help sort out dynamics that are not necessarily obvious to her, to help her situate her ideals and values within the organization. All of these examples are rooted in the stressors of public school teaching and in each instance, the participant relied on the relationships they have built, or offered themselves as a resource to others, to manage the stressor and to grow professionally.

Violet, a Contrast

Finally, Violet provides a contrasting point of reference, which by the nature of the contrast, lends support to the above analysis. The idea that eustress and distress are distinct constructs, not ends of a continuum is supported by this study. Each of the participants could be described as generally positively oriented. While all of the participants showed evidence of work engagement, Debbie, Kristine, Scott, Lori and Fiona showed more explicit construction of meaning as well as higher levels of hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience. For Violet, while she enjoys her work, the passion the others expressed, that savoring, was not evident. For her, the work was more simply a job and she experienced more distress than the others seemed to experience. Additionally, Violet's descriptions of her work and school interactions did not seem to contain that element of urgency. She clearly expressed a desire to be successful in her teaching and she understands the important role that teachers play in the learning of their students. She

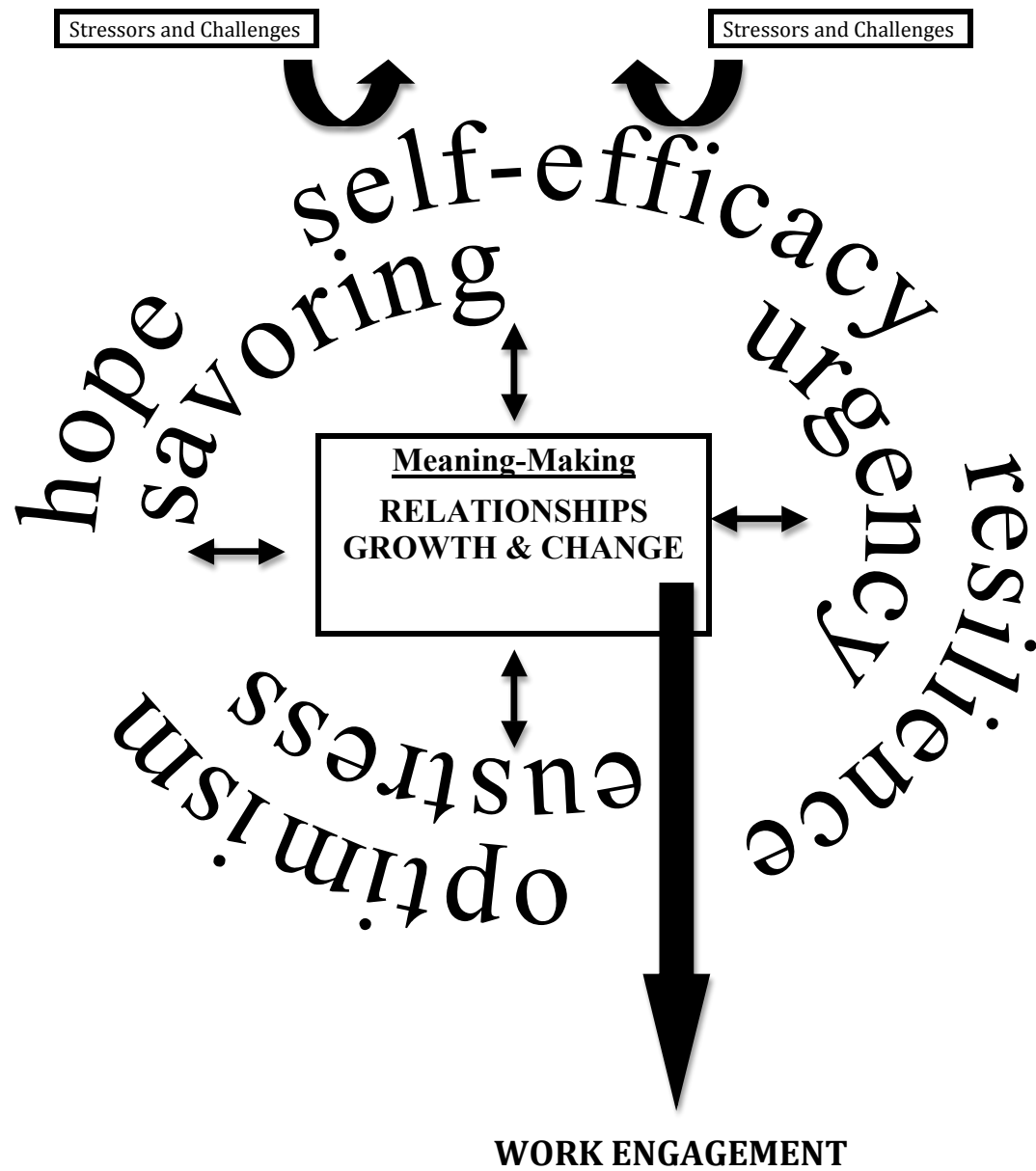
did not, however, venture into the area of the impact teachers can have on the *lives* of their students, as the other participants did.

In summary, the data provides for the development of four points, which overlap to some degree:

- Work engagement and eustressful orientation towards the stressors inherent in the work of public school teaching are evident in each of the participants, except Violet; savoring of experiences, including those not inherently positive, and an inherent urgency of the importance of the work contribute to the meaning-making of these teachers
- The resources of Psychological Capital seem to work to provide a buffer that allows for the positive meaning-making found in the relationships, professional growth and positive orientation towards even difficult change
- Work engagement is the outcome evidencing the relationship between the PsyCap resources and the positively oriented meaning-making of the teachers in their work
- The more distressful orientation of Violet is also evident in her meaning-making which, by contrast, supports the other ideas developed above.

Figure 4 ties these ideas together.

Figure 4: The interrelationship of eustress, PsyCap, and work engagement



This graphic attempts to show the resources of PsyCap acting as a protector or buffer that allows for the meaning-making of the teacher, with the effects of the stressors deflected. The positioning of eustress, urgency, and savoring inside the loop of the PsyCap resources implies that the PsyCap resources facilitate those responses. There is something of a reciprocal relationship; with the development of the relationships and the professional growth and change comes a further development of the resources of the PsyCap components, a further development of the components allows for further positively based meaning-making. Work engagement is the result of the positively oriented meaning-making experiences of the teachers.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

A great deal is known about the negative effects of stress and the ways in which stress leads to negative work and personal outcomes for individuals. The literature review and subsequent data analysis for this study attempts to look at stress from a positive orientation, describing eustress conceptually as based in the Positive Psychology literature.

Because this study is based in life histories, the research questions, interviews, and therefore the data progressed from personal experiences and incorporation of those experiences into a sense of self to meaning making with regards to the stressors inherent in public education today.

The research questions that formed the basis of the study are:

- How do teachers' life experiences and values contribute to their understanding of the stressors inherent in public school teaching today?
- How do those elements of modern day public school teaching typically thought to be stressful on teachers influence the way in which some teachers define their role as teachers? How do these stressors contribute to the meaning these teachers ascribe to their work?
- Does a positive orientation towards stressors contribute to a teacher's sense of urgency or meaning construction in their work? If so, in what ways?

- What personal resources do teachers identify as significant to their orientation towards the stressors inherent in the profession of teaching? In what ways do they draw upon those resources and utilize them as assets?
- How do the personal resources some teachers use in their experiences of stressors in the workplace lead to engagement?

The answers to the research questions are intertwined and overlapping and, ultimately, lend support for the ideas of Psychological Capital as an asset that can be used to generate eustressful responses to stressors, leading to work engagement, by providing examples from the field of education.

Through this research I have attempted to draw a relationship between resources, as described by the Conservation of Resources theory and the newly developing concept of Psychological Capital, and work engagement, looking at psychological capital as a means of mediating stressful work situations in such a way as to understand the stressors in relation to the positive meaning of one's work. A recurring theme throughout the literature review was the role of goal identification, goal setting, and goal achievement. The goal of developing relationships with students in a way that establishes meaning making for both teachers and students is evident in the priority these teachers place on it in their work. Additionally, it was clear that these teachers value their own professional growth, an activity that is also grounded in goal setting.

This doctoral research also utilized elements of Positive Psychology to look at ways in which individuals ascribe meaning to stressful work through utilizing positive psychological capacities, including hope, optimism, resilience and self-efficacy. The

participants in the study demonstrated each of these capacities, with hope and self-efficacy being most evident. The qualitative research methods used to gather teachers' experiences of the concepts described in the literature review, including positive psychological capital, eustress and savoring, and work engagement, add to the knowledge base by giving a voice and specific descriptor in the education field. The previous quantitative work in this area provided a solid foundation for understanding the concepts inherent in eustress and Psychological Capital. Narrative storytelling facilitated getting beyond the predetermined outcomes of questionnaires, adding the richer description of the experiences of teachers.

Since we know that “the teacher is the ultimate key to educational change and school improvement” (Hargreaves, 1993, p. vii), understanding who teachers are is an important consideration as educational change is undertaken. Who each of us is is derived from the myriad of relationships, prior experiences, values, goals and understandings of our lives. By taking a close look at how some teachers came to positively incorporate the stressors of being a modern day public school teacher into how they approach their students and their commitment to the work of the profession helps the profession cultivate a more positive affect and a healthier way of understanding how the variables that influence our work can be incorporated into the meaning derived from our work. In order to do this we must recognize that how teachers teach is “grounded in their backgrounds, their biographies, in the kinds of teachers they have become” (Hargreaves, 1993, p. vii) which we can extract or interpret from interviews about their approach to their practice, the values and experiences they incorporate on a day-to-day basis.

This study attempts to examine how some teachers in public schools are oriented in a positive way towards the stressors inherent in their work. This kind of orientation allows positive meaning-making, leading towards work engagement instead of burnout. The study lends support to the concepts of Psychological Capital as an asset that can support teachers in maintaining a positive outlook, eustressful responses, and work engagement as an indicator of eustressful responses.

Each of these teachers drew on personal resources, including the constructs of Psychological Capital, to derive positive meaning from their work. The extent to which they can be described as having a eustressful orientation towards the stressors encountered varied but obvious work engagement was present in most.

This study is situated within a growing body of literature. The orientation towards Positive Psychology, rather than psychology that focuses on deficits or what is wrong, is growing. The qualitative nature of this study adds a depth to the previous data, which is quantitative in nature. The stories of these teachers provide examples that describe the conceptual ideas in the words of ordinary people. Stories give perspective over time, including how meaning has evolved for the individual, as opposed to the point in time nature of quantitative data. The stories of others are what cause all of us, researchers in particular, to wonder and explore more and deeper. Finally, the study is rooted in the territory of teaching, one of the caring professions. Previous research in areas of eustress and PsyCap have centered in the business world, seeking to maximize human potential as part of a business model. In my opinion, the maximization of human potential and building on assets cannot be underestimated in the caring professions, such as teaching. Given the human to human interaction inherent in teaching and the development of the

potential of children, it is essential that we have understandings of the ways in which teachers interpret their work so that we can find ways to maximize the experience for all.

Many robust ideas are found in the data from this study but it is important to note that the study does not attempt to be exhaustive or to present ideas that are necessarily generalizable or transferable, but rather to present aspects of the life stories of several teachers from a variety of circumstances in an exploration of the concepts explored. There are many possibilities for expanding on the findings of this study. Future work in this area might include a more longitudinal look at the interpretation of stressors over the course of a career or how teachers in a given school perceive and make meaning from the stressors in their environment. Perhaps the most interesting and useful work would be to expand the work done by Luthans et al. in investigating the ways in which Psychological Capital can be fostered and grown in a work situation. Their work suggests that there are interventions that can be undertaken to develop hope, optimism, resilience and self-efficacy. The stressors of today's work in public education, accountability, teacher evaluation, children who are at risk, low resources, etc. are not likely to go away or change drastically in the near future. Teachers will continue to have high demands placed on them. Introduction of interventions that increase the capacities of Psychological Capital might decrease the rate of burnout and allow more teachers to stay in the field. There is a need for more study in this area.

This study has implications for teachers and school administrators. We seek to hire and retain teachers who are engaged in their work. Teaching is a very complicated profession, with stressors both from inside and outside the classroom, as well as inside and outside the school. Teachers bring their own life stories to their work; incorporated in

those stories are often more points of stress. Therefore it is important to hire people who have a long-term orientation towards using their assets in their work engagement.

Identification of candidates who are resilient and also hopeful can lead to better outcomes for children and teachers.

In summary, the data from this study lends support to the concepts of eustressful responses and savoring leading to work engagement for teachers. The stories of most of the teachers in this study lend support for the idea that hope, self-efficacy, resilience and optimism work together as assets the teachers use to generate that positive response to many of the stressors they face. The positive orientation towards what is inherently stressful work fosters important relationships, personal and professional growth, and a confidence that one has the skills to meet the challenges. In turn, the teachers are engaged in their work in ways that foster a cycle of the same. These words of Fiona point to the ways in which these teachers avoid burnout and thrive through savoring their work:

There are so many little moments in every day and it's so different for each child, you know, I mean I know it sounds like a clichéd Hallmark card but for some kids it's their fluency growth. You know if you're tracking their fluency and just how...look at this progress you've made and then they are just beaming. So it's, I guess, whenever you see a child being proud of their own progress, of their own work. That makes me feel proud of my job and proud of the work that I maybe did that day. So these moments happen often and they're never very big. There's never like a big hoopla; they're quiet and they're often intimate but yes those are the moments that I like to sort of pull close. (Fiona)

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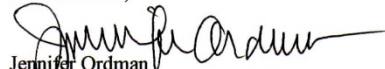
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Appendix A: IRB Approval

- Only the most recent IRB-approved versions of assent/consent forms may be used in association with this project.
- Any changes to the funding source or funding status must be sent to the IRB as an amendment.
- Prior to implementing revisions to project materials or procedures, you must submit an amendment application detailing the changes to the IRB for review and receive notification of approval.
- You must promptly report any problems that have occurred involving research participants to the IRB in writing.
- If your project will continue beyond the approval period, you are responsible for submitting a request for renewal to the IRB at least 3 weeks prior to the expiration date. The renewal form can be downloaded from the IRB web page at <http://research.depaul.edu>.
- **Once the research is completed, you must send a final report closing the research to the IRB.**

The Board would like to thank you for your efforts and cooperation and wishes you the best of luck on your research. If you have any questions, please contact me by telephone at (312) 362-7497 or by email at jordman@depaul.edu.

For the Board,



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Appendix B: Participant Selection Criteria

Participants for this study include individuals who:

- Are seasoned public school teachers with at least five years of experience beyond the student teaching experience
- Have most of their experience based in the classroom (not as a resource or support staff member)
- Are described as having a positive affect or outlook
- Are continually energized by their work, even under challenging situations; don't seem to get "bogged down"
- Are consistently revitalizing their work by trying new things
- Are thought of as problem solvers, someone who doesn't spend a lot of time "admiring a problem" but rather seeks solutions; an idea generator
- Have a global outlook, are able to see beyond their own classroom
- Are involved in the school community beyond their own classroom (e.g. serve on multiple committees, serve as mentors, bridge the gap between school and community in some way, etc.)
- Are the type of teachers one thinks of nominating for awards that recognize outstanding service to the profession

Appendix C: Interview Guide

IDENTITY –both in and out of school

- Before we talk specifically about your career, tell me about yourself as a person and how you've gotten to where you are today.
- Can we draw a timeline that represents the major events in your life thus far?
- Where did you grow up? Who was in your family when you were growing up? What kind of a neighborhood did you live in? How were the schools you went to? What do you remember from elementary school? High school? What were your interests outside of school?
- Where did you go to college and what did you study? How did that impact where you are today? What did you do after graduation?
- Do you still have friends and interests from each of the parts of your life? What role do they play in your life today?
- What are the most significant events of your life or particular times in your life that you would say had a profound impact on who and where you are today?
- Who is in your family today? How do they influence you and the decisions you make?
- What are some of the values you hold to be most important in life? Have your values changed over the course of your life? Why or why not?
- What are your strengths as a person? Have these changed over time?
- How do you define success? How do you define challenge?
- Describe one or two of your most proud moments in your life. Why do you select those events? What do they symbolize for you? In what ways did you grow from those experiences?
- Describe one or two of the biggest challenges in your life. How do/ did you deal with it? What resources were important to you in that time? Are there things you wish you had done differently? In what ways did you grow from those experiences?

INFLUENCES ON PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY -past, current, family, school experiences

- Who are the people who influenced you along the way in your decision to be a teacher?
- What role did your parents or other significant family members play in your becoming a teacher?
- Are there certain events you can point to that influenced your path to becoming a teacher?

- In what ways did your own school experiences impact your decision to become a teacher?
- How do these or other influences impact who you have become as a teacher and your daily practice?

TIMELINE —events or influences from the past, to become a teacher, to stay in teaching

- How did you come to be a teacher, to decide on education as your profession? How did that decision making process fit into your life?
- Have you ever thought of leaving teaching, pursuing another career? If so, what brought on that thinking? What made you change your mind and stay in teaching? What keeps you in teaching today?

SUCCESSES —descriptions and incorporation into sense of self

- For you, what are the most rewarding parts of being a teacher?
- In what ways do those gratifying parts of teaching impact your day-to-day work? How are those rewarding parts incorporated into your daily work?
- Please talk about three of the most gratifying or successful experiences you've had in your career in teaching. How do these experiences continue to impact your work and how you approach it?

RELATIONSHIPS —influences and changes over time

- Who are your role models, mentors, or “go to” people in the field of teaching? How do these people influence your work?
- Please describe your relationships with colleagues over time.
- In what ways do those relationships impact your work and who you see yourself as as a teacher and your ability to be effective in your job?
- Please describe your relationships with administrators over the years.
- In what ways do those relationships impact your work and who you see yourself as as a teacher and your ability to be effective in your job? Have your views of school administrators changed over time? In what ways? Why do you think your views have/have not changed over time?
- Please describe your relationships with parents over the years.
- In what ways do those relationships impact your work and who you see yourself as as a teacher and your ability to be effective in your job? Have your views of parents and your role with them changed over time? Why or why not?

CHALLENGES —descriptions and incorporation into sense of self (students, parents, administration, public policy, resources, extra demands, accountability)

- What are some of the most challenging parts of being a teacher nowadays?

- Specifically how do you take on those challenges? What impact do they have on your day-to-day teaching?
- How do you think about those challenges when you think about your past and future work in teaching?
- Schools and teachers are often portrayed negatively in the media. In what ways does this impact your work and how you see yourself as a teacher?
- Please talk about two of the most challenging situations you have worked with at school. In what ways have these situations or people influenced your growth as a teacher or your views of the teaching profession?
- Schools and teachers are increasingly asked to take on more social service types of roles. In what ways does that impact your work and sense of self as a teacher?

VISION OF THE FUTURE of self, trajectory in education, ambitions or aspirations

- Where do you see yourself in your career in five years? In ten? In fifteen?
- Do you see yourself as a lifelong teacher, someone who retires from the profession, or can you see yourself doing something else in the future? Why or why not?
- Why do you think some people “burn out” in teaching? Is it possible to prevent burnout? What does it take to prevent burnout?
- Can you describe how you have changed in your view of the teaching profession and yourself as a teacher over your career? What has influenced those changes in perspective?